

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
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Final Report
California Child and Family Services Review

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Final Report: California Child and Family Services Review

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period on seven child welfare outcomes pertaining to safety, permanency, and well-being and on seven systemic factors. The California CFSR was conducted the week of September 23, 2002. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the California Department of Social Services (CDSS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 49 cases at three sites throughout the State (one case was dropped because it did not meet requirements for an eligible case); and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three counties and the State capitol) with a wide range of stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local CDSS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

Information from the case review process and stakeholder interviews resulted in the finding that the State is effective in the following outcome-related areas:

- Timeliness of initiating investigations in response to reports of maltreatment (item 1).
- Providing services to families to prevent children’s removal from home (item 3).
- Reducing risk of harm to children (item 4).
- Placing children in close proximity to their parents or close relatives (item 11).
- Placing siblings together in foster care (item 12).
- Facilitating visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings (item 13).
- Locating and assessing relatives as potential placement resources (item 15).
- Supporting the parent-child relationships of children in foster care (item 16).
- Conducting caseworker visits with children (item 19).
- Meeting children’s needs for physical health services (item 22).

Despite these many strengths, the data for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2000 reported in the State Data Profile indicate that California did not meet the national standards for the following outcome measures:

- The rate of recurrence of substantiated child maltreatment within 6 months of a prior substantiated maltreatment.
- The incidence of maltreatment of children in foster care.

- The rate of foster care re-entries within 12 months of discharge from a previous foster care episode.
- The percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of a child's entry into foster care.
- The percentage of finalized adoptions occurring within 24 months of a child's entry into foster care.
- The percentage of children experiencing no more than two placements during the first 12 months in foster care.

In addition, a particular area of concern is achieving timely permanency for children and the reluctance of some agencies and courts to terminate parental rights (TPR).

Based on information from the case reviews and the State Data Profile, the State did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. California did not achieve substantial conformity with safety outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) primarily because (1) the incidence of maltreatment of children in foster care for FFY 2000, as reported in the State data profile (1.06%), did not meet the national standard of .57 percent or less; and (2) the rate of recurrence of substantiated child maltreatment within 6 months for FFY 2000 (10.7%) did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less.

Additionally, California did not achieve substantial conformity for safety outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate) because case reviewers determined that the agency's risk assessment process did not always identify the underlying issues contributing to the risk of harm to children. Consequently, the services provided often were not sufficient to reduce risk of harm. In addition, stakeholders expressed concern about the ability of the child welfare agency to protect children effectively in their homes in the context of a State-imposed 12-month time limitation placed on in-home family services. It was noted that because of this time limitation, services often were terminated without regard to an assessment of change in the level of risk.

The State did not achieve substantial conformity with permanency outcome 1 (Children have permanency and stability in their living situations) because case reviews revealed that (1) many children lacked stability in their foster care placements and (2) many children experienced unnecessary delays in achieving the permanency goals of reunification and adoption. In addition, information from stakeholders and case reviews indicated that both the courts and the agency are reluctant to approve TPR petitions unless an adoptive home has been identified for the child and the prospective adoptive parents are ready to adopt. Concerns also were expressed regarding the agency practice of establishing non-relative guardianship rather than adoption as a permanency option because of the belief that families will lose access to some services (e.g., child care subsidies) or will not receive adequate financial assistance if they adopt.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity with permanency outcome 2 (The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children), five of the six items assessed for the outcome (items 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16) were rated as a Strength. The primary concern identified pertained to agency efforts to ensure that children in foster care maintained connections to extended family, friends, schools, and their heritage.

Substantial conformity with child well-being outcome 1 (Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs) was not achieved based on CFSR findings that CDSS is not consistent in assessing and meeting the service needs of children and families (item 17) or in involving parents and children in the case-planning process (item 18). In addition, although the CFSR found that caseworkers were diligent in their efforts to visit children (item 19), particularly children in foster care, caseworker visits with parents (item 20) often were not sufficiently frequent or of sufficient quality to ensure children's safety and/or promote attainment of case goals.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity with child well-being outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs), the general CFSR finding was that in a large percentage of cases, the agency was consistent in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs. However, in 19 percent of the applicable cases, although educational needs were assessed, case reviewers determined that services were not provided to meet identified needs.

California also did not achieve substantial conformity with child well-being outcome 3 (Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs). Although the CFSR found that CDSS was highly effective in meeting children's physical health needs, reviewers and stakeholders determined that the agency was not consistent in its efforts to address children's mental health needs, particularly for children in the in-home services cases. A key concern identified by stakeholders was that mental health services are not always of sufficient quality to adequately address children's mental health problems.

CFSR findings with respect to the State's performance on the systemic factors suggest that the State does not have in place many of the necessary systems to support the attainment of children's safety, permanency, and well-being. Although the State was found to be in substantial conformity with the factor of statewide information system and agency responsiveness to the community, the State was not in substantial conformity with the systemic factors related to the case review system; quality assurance system; training; service array; or foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. With regard to the statewide information system, while the CFSR evaluates whether the automated system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of foster care children, it does not evaluate whether the State's system meets the Federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) functional requirements. It has yet to be determined that California meets the SACWIS functional requirements. Some specific concerns identified with regard to the systemic factors were the following:

- Parents are not being consistently involved in the case planning process.

- Terminating parental rights is not being done in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.
- The State's existing quality assurance system does not evaluate the effectiveness of services or assess outcomes.
- There is no Statewide uniform requirement for initial training of child welfare agency staff, ongoing training focusing on staff development, or training for caregivers.
- Services are not accessible to families in all political jurisdictions.
- The approach to service children and families is not individualized and there is a lack of individualized services, particularly for youth and Native American children.
- There is a lack of coordination at the State level of services and benefits of Federal or federally assisted programs, including coordination with Tribes and Tribal organizations.
- All foster family homes are not being held to the same standards established by the State for licensure/approval.
- There are insufficient processes for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in care.

The following is a summary of the CFSR ratings regarding specific outcomes and systemic factors.

KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1. Although almost 90 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved this item, the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, or the national standard for the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

With respect to maltreatment in foster care, according to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) does not currently capture information about child maltreatment perpetrators who are relative caregivers or group home staff. Consequently, the State's rate of maltreatment in foster care (1.06%) reflects only the incidence of child maltreatment experienced by children placed in foster family agency certified homes or in licensed foster family homes.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 96 percent of the applicable cases, the agency initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in a timely manner. The rating for this item is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, county compliance review data for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2001/2002 indicated that 90 percent of the 10 counties that completed the review process as of June 2002 were in compliance with respect to timeliness in making initial contacts following a report of child maltreatment.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although in 91 percent of the 47 applicable cases, there was no repeat maltreatment, the State's rate of repeat maltreatment for the year 2000 reported in the State data profile (10.7%) did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent. Because the two maltreatment recurrence indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary that the criteria and standards for both indicators be met for the item to be rated as a Strength.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 85.1 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity on this outcome, a general CFSR finding was that the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to children in their own homes and to ensure that the risk of harm to children was adequately addressed in a large percentage of the cases. The case review findings and stakeholder interviews indicated that, for the most part, CDSS uses an array of services, particularly in-home services, to prevent placement and reduce risk of harm. However, stakeholders and case reviewers also noted that the risk assessment process does not always identify underlying issues that contribute to the risk of harm to the children. Consequently, the services provided do not always address all of the relevant child safety areas. In addition, stakeholders expressed concern about the time limitations the State places on in-home family services, suggesting that services should be terminated based on whether a risk of harm continues to be present, rather than on whether the State's 12-month time limitation has been reached.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 89 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes to prevent removal or facilitate family reintegration after reunification.

The Statewide Assessment notes, however, that in California the proportion of children entering foster care following a substantiated report is greater than the national average. According to the Statewide Assessment, this suggests that greater efforts are needed to support children in their own homes.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child.

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 87.2 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS made diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children. The key concerns identified in the case reviews pertained to risk assessments that failed to address underlying risk-related issues, such as domestic violence or mental illness, and lack of follow-up to ensure services were received.

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Status of Permanency Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 48.0 percent of cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicated that for fiscal year 2000, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the rate of foster care re-entries, (2) the percentage of children achieving reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, (3) the percentage of children discharged to finalized adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care, and (4) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placements.

In general, the CFSR found that CDSS was not consistent in its efforts to ensure that children have permanency and stability in their living situations. All of the indicators assessed for this outcome were assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. A key concern identified was that there were delays in achieving permanency for children through reunification and adoption. The review findings indicated that in many cases the goal of reunification is maintained for too long a period of time and the courts are reluctant to approve TPR petitions unless the agency has an adoptive home for the child. Concerns also were expressed regarding the practice of using non-relative guardianship rather than adoption as a permanency option because families will lose access to services (e.g., child care subsidies) and/or will not receive sufficient financial assistance if they adopt

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Despite the finding that no re-entries into foster care occurred for the cases reviewed, data from the State Data Profile indicate that California's re-entry rate for fiscal year 2000 (10.7%) does not meet the national standard of 8.6 percent or less. States must meet both the case review and the data indicators to be rated a Strength for this item.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although 76 percent of the applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item, in 24 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced multiple placement changes that did not further attainment of their goals or their treatment needs. In addition, data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (77.8%) does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more. The Statewide Assessment and stakeholders interviewed onsite attributed multiple placements primarily to children in California often being placed initially in an emergency shelter home or facility to allow the agency to make an in-depth assessment of the children's placement needs and to identify the most suitable placements. During the review of cases onsite, however, this was not the primary reason found for unnecessary moves; the changes in the cases reviewed resulted from the agency's lack of attention at the time of placement to the foster parents' ability to meet the child's needs.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although this item was rated as a Strength in 76 percent of the applicable cases, in 24 percent of these cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. A key finding was that the goal of reunification was being maintained for long periods of time, even when there was a lack of evidence that reunification was likely to occur.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although 81 percent of the applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item, in 19 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner. In addition, data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (53.2%) does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent or more.

Item 9. Adoption

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although 60 percent of the applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item, in 40 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner. In addition, data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of finalized adoptions in FY

2000 that occurred within 24 months of the child's removal from home (18.0%) does not meet the national standard of 32.0 percent or more. According to the Statewide Assessment, although there have been significant accomplishments regarding adoptions of children in foster care, adoption is not being achieved in a timely manner. However, the Statewide Assessment also notes that significant program efforts (e.g., concurrent planning, permanency planning mediation, kin adoption, etc.) have been implemented in recent years to improve the State's capacity to achieve timely adoptions.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although 50 percent of the 4 applicable cases were rated as a Strength for this item, in 50 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to ensure permanency for children with regard to alternative living options. The key concern was that the goal of long-term foster care was established for children without adequate exploration of other possible goals, such as adoption or guardianship.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Status of Permanency Outcome 2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 88.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. Although California did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, five out of six of the individual indicators assessed for the outcome were rated as a Strength and most of the stakeholders interviewed expressed positive opinions of the State's efforts with regard to achieving this outcome. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that were rated as having substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 90 percent. Key concerns identified pertained primarily to the agency's performance with regard to preserving connections for children in foster care.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 96 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS made diligent efforts to ensure that children's foster care placements were in close proximity to their parents or relatives.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 94 percent of the applicable cases, siblings were placed together, or their separation was deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children. According to the Statewide Assessment, placing siblings together is an agency priority unless there is documented evidence that doing so is detrimental to one of the children.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 90 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation, particularly among siblings in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, a CDSS mail survey of California's county child welfare agencies and juvenile probation departments revealed that most respondents arrange for visitation between children and their parents, siblings, and grandparents.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the item was rated as a Strength in 84 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that in 16 percent of the applicable cases, the agency had not made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections to community, heritage, faith, and friends.

Item 15. Relative placement

This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 88 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. The Statewide Assessment also notes that California places children with relatives at a higher rate than any other placement option.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because reviewers determined that in 90 percent of applicable cases, the agency provided adequate services to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

III. WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 59.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

An overall CFSR finding was that CDSS is not consistent in meeting the service needs of children and families. In addition, although State policy requires parent participation in the case-planning process, there were a substantial percentage of cases in which parents and children (when appropriate) were not involved in case planning. Finally, although caseworkers were found to visit children with

sufficient frequency, particularly children in foster care, caseworker visits with parents often were not sufficiently frequent or of sufficient quality to ensure children's safety and promote attainment of case goals.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the item was rated as a Strength in 65 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that in 35 percent of the cases CDSS had not been effective in addressing the service needs of children and parents. Although there were no cases in which reviewers found that CDSS had not addressed the needs of foster parents, several stakeholders commented that the agency's efforts to address foster parents' needs could be strengthened, particularly the need for respite services and in-home assistance to address a child's behavioral/mental and physical health issues.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the item was rated as a Strength in 53 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that in 47 percent of the cases, CDSS had not made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This finding is not consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment that it is CDSS policy that parents be involved in the case planning. The Statewide Assessment also notes that CDSS promotes the philosophy that a strength-based approach to families is the most effective method of engaging parents in case planning.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 90 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality to monitor children's safety and well-being. This is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment noting that the percentage of counties passing the compliance reviews on making monthly contacts with the child improved from 69 percent in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1998/1999 to 90 percent in SFY 2001/2002.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the item was rated as a Strength in 82 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that in 18 percent of applicable cases, the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to promote the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 81.1 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child.

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although the item was rated as a Strength in 81 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that in 19 percent of the applicable cases, CDSS had not made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. The key concern identified was that in some cases children were not receiving services to address the needs identified through educational assessments.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 77.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. The CFSR found that CDSS was highly effective in meeting children's physical health needs, but was less consistent in its efforts to address children's mental health needs, particularly for children in the in-home services cases. A key concern identified by stakeholders was that mental health services are not always of sufficient quality to meet children's mental health service needs.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 95 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. Overall, medical and dental services were accessible, services were provided, and documentation was thorough.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although this item was rated as a Strength in 74 percent of the applicable cases, in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. Most of these cases involved children receiving services while remaining in their homes.

KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Status of Statewide Information System- In Substantial Conformity

California is in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

This item is rated as a Strength because information on the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for each child in foster care is retrievable from the State's automated child welfare system. The CFSR does not evaluate whether the State's system meets the Federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) functional requirements, and this report does not address those requirements.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Status of Case Review System – Not in Substantial Conformity

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although State statutes require caseworkers to develop case plans and to involve parents in the development process, there is no statewide protocol in place to ensure parent and child participation in developing the case plan. In 47 percent of the applicable cases reviewed during the CFSR, parents (and children, when appropriate) were not involved in developing the case plan. According to many stakeholders and case reviewers, the most common approach to the case planning process is one in which the caseworker prepares the plan and then presents it to the family.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

This item was rated as a Strength because the State has statutory and regulatory requirements for conducting 6-month periodic reviews and these reviews usually are completed in a timely manner. Stakeholders in one county noted that reviews are held more frequently than every 6 months for children who are younger than 3 years old.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

This item was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has statutory or regulatory requirements that permanency hearings be held every 12 months and these hearings usually are held in accordance with this requirement. Stakeholders noted that the permanency review process is accelerated for children who are younger than 3 years old.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has statutory and regulatory requirements for terminating parental rights (TPR) for children in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, when TPR is not sought, the agency is not consistent in documenting reasons for not filing for TPR. In addition, often the agency will not seek TPR, and/or the court will not grant TPR, unless an adoptive home for the child has been identified and the pre-adoptive home demonstrates a readiness to adopt. These practices are not in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

This item was assigned a rating of Strength because the State provides a process for notifying foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers of reviews and hearings and affords them opportunities to be heard in any review or hearing. Stakeholders interviewed during the on-site phase of the CFSR were in general agreement that foster parents and pre-adoptive parents receive notification of court hearings and administrative reviews. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that foster parents actively participate in hearings and that judges are responsive to what foster parents have to say.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Status of Quality Assurance System – Not in Substantial Conformity

California is not in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

This item was rated as a Strength because the State has established standards to protect the safety and health of children and mechanisms to ensure adherence to the standards. Mechanisms to ensure that standards are implemented appropriately include the Foster Care Ombudsman Program, grievance procedures, complaint investigations, State fair hearings, licensing compliance system, and child welfare services compliance reviews. The State also certifies and monitors out-of-State facilities where California children are placed.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has a quality assurance (QA) system, the primary QA activity – the Division 31 compliance review system – assesses compliance with only six factors and does not assess the effectiveness and quality of services delivered. Stakeholders noted that the State is developing a new QA system (to be implemented in January 2004) that will be similar to the Federal CFSR process and will include outcome-focused reviews of randomly selected cases. Stakeholders also indicated that many counties have developed their own QA procedures and Los Angeles County stakeholders indicated that they have already begun implementing reviews that are similar to the Federal CFSR.

VII. TRAINING

Status of Training – Not in Substantial Conformity

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

Item 32 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State makes available an array of training opportunities and some counties have implemented formal new-worker training, there is no statewide requirement for initial training for all staff that supports the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although a variety of continuing education and training opportunities are made available to staff, there are no statewide requirements for on-going training of staff that support the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Item 34 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State makes training for foster and adoptive caregivers and group-care staff available, there is no uniform statewide training required for all caregivers. In addition, because training requirements for caregivers vary across the State, when foster parents trained in one county move to another county, the training they have received does not always meet the requirements of the new county.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Status of Service Array- Not in Substantial Conformity

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

Item 35 was rated as a Strength because the State has a broad array of services available that assess the strengths and needs of families to create a safe home environment so that children can remain at home, and/or achieve permanency if placed in foster care.

Stakeholders expressed positive views of the Kin Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program, the Kinship Support Service Program (KSSP), and pilot Family Group Decision Making and Wraparound Services programs.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

Item 36 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has a wide array of services, many of the services described under item 35 are not accessible to families in all political jurisdictions and, where services are available, there often are long waiting lists. In addition, stakeholders noted that there is a lack of necessary core services in all counties and, although there are exemplary pilot programs operating in various locations in the State, there is no effort underway to implement these programs statewide.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Item 37 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although counties have the flexibility to develop and deliver services to meet unique community needs, stakeholders conveyed concern about a lack of individualized services for youth and Native American children. In addition, many of the cases reviewed had case plans that were generic and lacked an individualized approach to serving children and families.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Status of Agency Responsiveness To The Community – In Substantial Conformity

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Item 38 was rated as a Strength because information provided in the Statewide Assessment and obtained through the onsite CFSR stakeholder interviews indicates that State and county child welfare agencies are highly responsive to input from the community in developing the goals and objectives of the CFSP and have developed councils, task forces, and other organizations to ensure that there are sufficient avenues for community input.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered.

Item 39 was rated as a Strength because county child welfare agencies and CDSS have established many collaboratives and those partners have begun to participate in the development of the State's Annual Progress and Services Report.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Item 40 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there are exemplary efforts at the county level with regard to coordinating services and benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population, there is a lack of State-level coordination of services and benefits, including coordination with Tribes and Tribal organizations.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Item 41 was rated as a Strength because the State has established standards for licensing and approving homes that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Item 42 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although CDSS has one common set of licensing/approval standards, there is evidence that, across counties, staff interpretation of the standards is not consistent. As a result, the same standards are not being applied to all foster family homes. In addition, all relative foster family homes have not been assessed and approved against the new standards.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

Item 43 was rated as a Strength because stakeholders reported that criminal background checks for foster and adoptive placements are completed prior to placing a child with the family. California law also requires a check of the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) maintained by the California Department of Justice and in many counties reviews of Department of Motor Vehicle records are conducted.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Item 44 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State does not have a statewide process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in care. Stakeholders noted that there is a need to recruit more Native American and African American homes.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

This item was rated as a Strength because there are processes in place for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements. California formed the Cross Jurisdictional Task Force to develop strategies to maintain compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act related to cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements. Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that recruitment efforts often cross county lines and both internal and national adoption exchanges are used to find potential adoptive families.

Introduction

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the State of California. The CFSR was conducted the week of September 23, 2002. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment, prepared by the State child welfare agency – the California Department of Social Services (CDSS);
- The State Data Profile, prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services providing child welfare data for the year 2000;
- Reviews of 49 cases at three sites throughout the State (one case was dropped because it did not meet requirements for an eligible case); and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three sites and at the State-level) with stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel, collaborating agency personnel, service providers, court personnel, and attorneys.

The key characteristics of the 49 cases reviewed are the following:

- 25 cases were reviewed in Los Angeles County, 12 in San Mateo County, and 12 in Stanislaus County.
- All 49 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review
- 25 cases were “foster care cases” (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 24 were “in-home services cases” (cases in which families received services from the child welfare agency while children remained in their homes and none of the children in the family was in out-of-home care during the period under review).
- In 14 cases, all children in the family were White; in 12 cases, all children in the family were African American; in 12 cases, all children in the family were Hispanic/Latino; in 3 cases, all children in the family were Asian/Pacific Islander; and in 8 cases, children were of two or more races.
- Of the 49 cases reviewed, the **primary** reason for the opening of a child welfare agency case was the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 16 cases (33%)
 - Physical abuse – 9 cases (18%)
 - Substance abuse by parents – 8 cases (16%)
 - Sexual abuse – 6 cases (12%)
 - Emotional maltreatment – 4 cases (8%)
 - Abandonment – 2 cases (4%)
 - Child in juvenile justice system – 2 cases (4%)
 - Mental/physical health of parent – 1 case (2%)

- Domestic violence in child's home – 1 case (2%)
- Of the 49 cases reviewed, the most frequently cited of **all** reasons for children coming to the attention of the child welfare agency included the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) – 30 cases (61%)
 - Physical abuse – 21 cases (43%)
 - Substance abuse by parents – 19 cases (39%)
 - Emotional maltreatment – 10 cases (20%)
 - Domestic violence in child's home – 10 cases (20%)
 - Sexual abuse – 7 cases (14%)
 - Abandonment – 6 cases (12%)
- In 13 (52%) of the 25 foster care cases, the children entered foster care prior to the period under review and either remained in foster care during the entire period under review or exited foster care to adoption or independent living.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State's performance in achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table presenting key findings, a discussion of the State's status with regard to the outcome, and a presentation and discussion of each item (indicator) assessed. Because Los Angeles County serves a very large population of children and families, findings pertaining to Los Angeles County may be presented and discussed in addition to the discussion of the overall State findings when relevant. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.

SECTION 1: OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Safety Outcome 1

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	22	11	10	43	89.6
Partially Achieved:	3	1	1	5	10.4
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	
Not Applicable:	0	0	1	1	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1 or less	10.7		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	.57 or less	1.06		X	

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 1

California did not achieve substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1. Although almost 90 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved this item, the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a 6-month period, or the national standard for the percentage of children maltreated in foster care.

With respect to maltreatment in foster care, according to the Statewide Assessment, the State's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) does not currently capture information about child maltreatment perpetrators who are relative caregivers or group home staff. Consequently, the State's rate of maltreatment in foster care (1.06%) reflects only the incidence of

child maltreatment experienced by children placed in foster family agency certified homes or in licensed foster family homes. Stakeholders expressed concern that, although there are procedures in place for investigating child maltreatment in foster care, there is a need for more careful screening of foster parents and other individuals living in the foster homes prior to placement of a child in the home. Stakeholders also suggested that improvements in the process of matching foster families with children based on the children's needs may help reduce the rate of maltreatment in foster care.

Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that insufficient efforts are being made to monitor the safety of children in foster care placements. For example, some stakeholders believe that caseworkers frequently do not follow up when foster youth indicate that there are problems in their foster care placement. They also expressed concern that social workers do not visit children in their foster care settings with sufficient frequency to monitor risk. In addition, the State licensing process does not include completion of an in-depth home study/psychosocial assessment; this is done after the home is licensed as a condition for the county to place children in the home. As a result, there is no requirement to routinely complete this home study when the home is annually reassessed for continued compliance with licensing requirements, even if there are changes in the family structure (e.g., a new adult is living in the home that may impact the care of the child).

According to the Statewide Assessment, the CDSS is developing foster/adoptive family assessment protocols that will examine the capacity of potential caregivers to parent appropriately the children in their care. Potential caregiver evaluations will be more consistent with those of prospective adoptive parents. The Statewide Assessment also notes that evaluating prospective foster parents with the same level of scrutiny as adoptive parents is expected to afford children greater protection. It is anticipated that the new home study protocols will result in reductions in actual and reported instances of abuse and neglect in foster care because prospective foster parents will be more thoroughly oriented, screened, and trained. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the following activities are necessary to reduce the rate of maltreatment in foster care:

- More consistent foster parent training across the counties.
- A licensing process that focuses more on the quality of the home rather than the physical requirements of the facility.
- More comprehensive and accurate data to better define the extent of maltreatment in foster care.

With respect to timeliness of investigations, case review findings indicate that CDSS is generally effective in initiating investigations of child maltreatment reports in a timely manner once the report is received by the agency caseworkers. However, in Los Angeles County, many stakeholders expressed concern about the agency's effectiveness with regard to receiving and processing child maltreatment reports through the Hotline in a timely manner. More information is provided regarding the Hotline in the discussion of item 1.

Information from the case reviews also indicates that CDSS is effective in preventing the recurrence of maltreatment. However, data provided in the State Data Profile indicate that California does not meet the national standard established for the outcome measure of maltreatment recurrence.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 1 was applicable for 25 of the 49 cases. Twenty-four cases were not applicable because they did not involve reports of child maltreatment during the period under review. In assessing item 1, reviewers were to determine whether the response to a maltreatment report occurring during the period under review had been initiated in accordance with the State child welfare agency requirements. In California, the time frame for initiating investigations is determined by the level of risk assigned to the report by the initial emergency response or Hotline workers. Based on the level of risk, the worker determines whether an immediate response (including immediate face-to-face contact) is necessary within 24 hours or if the investigation can be initiated within 10 days of receiving the referral. The results of the case review assessments were the following:

- Item 1 was rated as a Strength in 24 (96%) of the 25 applicable cases (11 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 1 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (4%) of the 25 applicable cases (which was not a foster care case).

This item was rated as a Strength in all cases in which the initiation of responses to child maltreatment reports occurring during the period under review was in accordance with State agency requirements for the type of report received. For the one case rated as an Area Needing Improvement, reviewers noted that the referral was classified as an “immediate response,” but the agency did not establish face-to-face contact with the child victim for 6 days.

Stakeholders commenting on this area were in general agreement that once a maltreatment report is received and classified, the agency is highly effective in initiating an investigation in a timely manner. However, stakeholders in Los Angeles County expressed the opinion that the agency Hotline’s response to reports is not effective or efficient. Stakeholders said that people reporting maltreatment to the Hotline often are put on hold for long periods of time or are told to call back later. In addition, according to several stakeholders, the Hotline procedures for recording information from the reporter and passing it along to an investigative unit can take up to 8 hours. Some stakeholders at this site suggested that Hotline staffing is not sufficient to meet the volume of calls, although staffing levels were recently increased. Some stakeholders, however, suggested that the county has taken steps to improve Hotline response, although there are still issues that need to be addressed.

Determination and Discussion: Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 96 percent of the applicable cases, the agency initiated an investigation of a maltreatment report in a timely manner. The rating for this item is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, county compliance review data for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2001/2002 indicated that 90 percent of the 10 counties that completed the review process as of June 2002 were in compliance with respect to the timeliness of initial contacts following a report of child maltreatment. This was noted to be a significant improvement over SFY 1994/1995, when this figure was 53 percent. However, Los Angeles County stakeholders voiced concern about the inconsistencies in Hotline responsiveness to maltreatment reports.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: The assessment of item 2 was applicable for 47 of the 49 cases. Two cases were not applicable for assessment because there were no substantiated maltreatment reports during the life of the case. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether there had been at least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review, and if so, whether another substantiated or indicated report occurred within 6 months of that report. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 2 was rated as a Strength in 43 (91%) of the 47 applicable cases (20 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 2 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (9%) of the 47 applicable cases (3 of which were foster care cases).

Item 2 was rated as a Strength in all cases in which there was no repeat maltreatment, including 29 cases in which there were no substantiated maltreatment reports during the period under review. In 14 of these 29 cases, the child was in foster care during the entire period under review or exited foster care to adoption or independent living.

There were only 14 cases in which there was at least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during the period under review. Four of these cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement because there was more than one substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period.

Additional findings with respect to maltreatment reports for the 47 applicable cases were the following:

- In 5 cases, there was only 1 maltreatment report over the life of the case.
- In 22 cases, there were between 2 and 5 maltreatment reports over the life of the case.
- In 13 cases, there were between 6 and 10 maltreatment reports over the life of the case.

- In 7 cases, there were more than 10 maltreatment reports over the life of the case.

Although not all of these reports were substantiated and reports outside the period under review were not considered in rating the item, the finding of numerous reports over the life of a case raises concerns about the actual recurrence of maltreatment.

Several stakeholders commenting about repeat maltreatment suggested that the agency attempts to prevent maltreatment recurrence through the use of structured decision making (SDM) in some areas of the State, frequent case conferences, and an array of services for families whose children remain in the home, including services that are culturally appropriate.

Determination and Discussion: Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Although in 91 percent of the 47 applicable cases, there was no repeat maltreatment, the State's rate of repeat maltreatment for the year 2000 reported in the State data profile (10.7%) did not meet the national standard of 6.1 percent or less. Because the two maltreatment recurrence indicators are assessed using different measures, it is necessary that the criteria and standards for both indicators be met for the item to be rated as a Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the State believes that the actual rate of maltreatment recurrence is about 7.3 percent, which still does not meet the national standard. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the State is considering implementing the following strategies to decrease the rate of repeat maltreatment:

- Improving the effectiveness of initial risk assessment of a child at the first contact.
- Expanding the availability of intensive services that build on family strengths and improve parental skills.
- Creating partnerships across disciplines and agencies to address the complex needs of high-risk families.
- Providing appropriate follow-up services after the initial investigation and when a child is returned home.
- Improving data quality to assess the State's progress in this area more accurately.
- Implementing the CWS Stakeholders Group Human Resources Subcommittee's recommendations to lower worker caseloads so that caseworkers have time to make more in-depth assessments of at-risk families, provide intensive in-home services, and ensure appropriate follow-up when a child is returned home.

Safety Outcome 2

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	20	11	9	40	85.1
Partially Achieved:	2	1	1	4	8.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	0	1	3	6.4
Not Applicable:	1	0	1		

STATUS OF SAFETY OUTCOME 2

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was substantially achieved in 85.1 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity on this outcome, reviewers determined that in a large percentage of the cases reviewed for the CFSR, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to children in their own homes and to ensure that the risk of harm to children was adequately addressed. Although both items assessed for this outcome were rated as a Strength, taken together, there was not a sufficient number of cases in which both items were rated as a Strength to result in a finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases.

The case review findings and stakeholder interviews indicated that, for the most part, CDSS uses an array of services, particularly in-home services, to prevent placement and reduce risk of harm. However, stakeholders and case reviewers also noted that the risk-assessment process does not always identify underlying issues that contribute to the risk of harm to the children. Consequently, the services provided do not always address all of the areas related to children's safety. In addition, stakeholders expressed concern about the time limitations placed on in-home family services, suggesting that services should be terminated according to whether a risk of harm continues to be present rather than whether the State's 12-month time limitation has been reached.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Safety Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: There were 36 cases for which an assessment of item 3 was applicable. Thirteen cases were excluded from this assessment because the children were in foster care for the entire review period or because there were no substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports or identified risks of harm to the children in the home during the period under review. For this item, reviewers assessed whether, in responding to a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report or risk of harm, the agency made diligent efforts to provide services to families to prevent removal of children from their homes while at the same time ensuring their safety. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 3 was rated as a Strength in 32 (89%) of the 36 applicable cases (12 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 3 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (11%) of the 36 applicable cases (1 of which was a foster care case).

In three cases, a rating of Strength was assigned to this item because reviewers determined that children were appropriately removed from their homes to ensure their safety. Twenty-nine cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that CDSS assessed the family's service needs appropriately and provided or referred the family for services to meet those needs. These services were provided either to prevent an initial removal (24 cases) or to prevent a re-removal after reunification (5 cases). The services included, but were not limited to, counseling, individual and family therapy, psychological assessments, parenting classes, transportation, intensive family preservation, alcohol and drug testing and treatment, child care, sexual abuse services, medical services, domestic violence counseling, case management, culturally sensitive and language-appropriate in-home services, anger management, education services, and family group conferencing.

Cases received a rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item when reviewers determined that services were not provided (1 case), or that the services provided were not sufficient to address the families' needs (3 cases). For example, in one case, services were provided to address issues such as children's hygiene and family housekeeping, but not to address the domestic violence problem that existed in the family.

State-level stakeholders who commented on this topic expressed the opinion that in some counties in the State there is an array of services available to prevent the removal of children from their homes or to support the reintegration of the family through reunification. A primary concern expressed by stakeholders at the county levels pertained to the voluntary nature of many services, even when families have a long history of referrals. According to some stakeholders, in many situations the agency does not respond until the "situation gets serious." This was attributed to a lack of funding to provide services that are not court-ordered. As one stakeholder noted, "if there is not enough evidence to file a petition (go to court), then some counties will not provide services."

Los Angeles County stakeholders indicated that the agency tends to refer families for services by providing them with names and telephone numbers, rather than providing case management and linking the families to needed services. Stakeholders and case reviewers in Los Angeles County also expressed concern about the State's 12-month limitation on in-home family service provision regardless of the status of the family at the end of the 12-month period. This limitation is established by State law (WIC 16506). The general consensus among Los Angeles County stakeholders was that service availability varies widely across the county. For example, they noted that there are many high quality pilot programs in the county, such as the Wraparound Services Program, that should be implemented county-wide.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 89 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their own homes either to prevent removal or facilitate family reintegration after reunification. However, according to the Statewide Assessment, the proportion of children entering foster care following a substantiated report in California is greater than the national average. The Statewide Assessment further notes that although the State has made concerted efforts to improve the provision of services to families, it is still a challenge to create long-term, sustainable change in multi-problem, at-risk families and to ensure that services are focused and coordinated in such a way as to optimize attainment of desired outcomes for children and families.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 4 was applicable for 47 of the 49 cases reviewed. Two cases were not applicable for assessment because the case was opened for a reason other than a substantiated or indicated report of abuse or neglect and there was no risk of harm to the child. In assessing item 4, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in each case. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 4 was rated as a Strength in 41 (87.2%) of the 47 applicable cases (22 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 4 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (12.8%) of the 47 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the children from home and providing services to the parents to reduce risk of harm (21 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately addressed by removing the children from the home and seeking termination of parental rights (TPR) either prior to or during the period under review (4 cases).

- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by providing services to families to address risk concerns while the children remain in the home (20 cases).
- The risk of harm to children was appropriately managed by removing the perpetrator from the home (2 cases).

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- There was an inadequate needs assessment leading to failure to address underlying risk factors (3 in-home services cases).
- There was insufficient follow up with families to ensure that services were being received (2 in-home services cases).
- There was insufficient supervision of visitation (1 foster care case).
- The case was closed without addressing key risk factors (1 in-home services case).
- The child was not removed from the home quickly enough to address risk (1 foster care case).

There were no reports of child maltreatment in foster care in any of the cases reviewed.

Stakeholders commenting on this area addressed a variety of topics related to risk reduction. One topic pertained to the use of a specific tool designed to assess safety and risk. Although in Los Angeles County there was some agreement that SDM is effective in assessing risk, stakeholders noted that it is not routinely used in the county and not used everywhere in the State. Stakeholders also noted that workers do not receive sufficient guidance on the risk-assessment process.

Another topic raised by stakeholders pertained to the issue of the 12-month in-home family-maintenance services' limitation, which also is discussed under item 2. The key concern for stakeholders was that 12 months may not be sufficient to resolve all of the family issues that contribute to the risk of harm to the child.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 87.2 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that CDSS made diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children. The key concerns identified in the case reviews pertained to inadequate risk assessments that failed to address underlying issues and lack of follow up on service provision.

II. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	5	2	5	12	48.0
Partially Achieved:	5	4	3	12	48.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	0	1	4.0
Not Applicable:	14	6	4	24	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard (%)	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries	8.6 or less	10.7		X	
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2 or more	53.2		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0 or more	18.0		X	
Stability of foster care placements	86.7 or more	77.8		X	

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME P1

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following findings:

- The outcome was substantially achieved in 48.0 percent of cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity.
- The State Data Profile indicated that for fiscal year 2000, the State did not meet the national standards for (1) the rate of foster care re-entries, (2) the percentage of children achieving reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, (3) the percentage of children discharged to finalized adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care, and (4) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placements.

In general, the CFSR found that CDSS was not consistent in its efforts to ensure that children have permanency and stability in their living situations. All of the items assessed for this outcome were rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Some of the key concerns identified through the case reviews and stakeholder interviews pertained to delays in achieving permanency for children through

reunification and adoption. The review findings indicated that in many cases the goal of reunification is maintained for too long a period of time and the courts are reluctant to approve terminating parental rights (TPR) petitions unless the agency has identified an adoptive home for the child that is ready to adopt. Concerns were also noted regarding the practice of using non-relative guardianship as a permanency option instead of adoption because adoptive families lose access to some services (e.g., child care subsidies) or receive reduced financial assistance when they adopt. Therefore, workers are not always actively pursuing the adoption option, even for young children coming into care.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 1 are presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Six of the 25 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of foster care re-entries because they involved children who entered foster care at some time during the period under review. In assessing this item, reviewers determined whether the entry into foster care during the period under review occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior foster care episode. The results of this assessment were that the item was rated as a Strength in all six cases. In addition, only 2 of the children in the 25 cases experienced more than 1 foster care entry during the life of the case.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue were in general agreement that re-entries into foster care are not a frequent occurrence. Stakeholders tended to attribute this to cases being kept open under State supervision from 6 to 12 months after physical reunification and that the county uses an array of services to promote reunification. This is consistent with case review findings that reunifications were supported by ongoing services to the family.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. Despite the finding that no re-entries into foster care occurred in the cases reviewed, data from the State Data Profile indicate that California's re-entry rate for Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2000 (10.7%) does not meet the national standard of 8.6 percent or less. It is necessary that the criteria and standards for both the case review and the statewide data measures be met for the item to receive an overall rating of Strength.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the factors that affect the State's rate of re-entry to foster care include the following:

- There is a singular focus by the court or child welfare agency on compliance with timelines, which may result in sending children home before sufficient services have been provided or before sufficient follow-up services are in place to ensure that the family is safe and stable.

- There are insufficient resources available to help maintain families when children are returned home.
- Worker caseloads are too high, which impacts the ability of child welfare agencies to provide sufficient post-reunification services.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 25 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of Item 6. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the child experienced multiple placement settings during the period under review and, if so, whether the changes in placement settings were necessary to achieve the child's permanency goal or meet the child's service needs. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 6 was rated as a Strength in 19 (76%) of the 25 applicable cases.
- Item 6 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (24%) of the 25 applicable cases.

Additional findings of the case review were the following:

- Children in 16 cases experienced only 1 placement during the period under review.
- Children in 4 cases experienced 2 placements during the period under review.
- Children in 5 cases experienced 3 or more placements during the period under review.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item if reviewers determined that a child did not experience a placement change during the period under review (16 cases) or that the placement changes experienced were in the child's best interest (e.g., movement from juvenile hall to a therapeutic facility) (3 cases).

A rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item was assigned to five cases when reviewers determined that placement changes resulted from the agency's lack of attention at the time of the initial placement to the ability of the foster parents/relative caretakers to meet the needs of the child. One case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that the child's current placement was not appropriate to his needs.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that many children experience multiple moves while in foster care. Some stakeholders indicated that children tend to be placed in emergency foster homes or shelters as their initial placements, particularly when they are removed from home by law enforcement. Although some stakeholders viewed this as a negative practice, others suggested that these temporary placements are useful to allow the agency time to search for appropriate relatives or foster

families. A few stakeholders suggested that placement stability in group homes is greater than it is in foster homes, although staff turnover often is high in group homes.

Stakeholders noted that one reason for placement instability is the lack of sufficient placement resources to meet the needs of the special needs children with complex mental health or behavioral issues. Stakeholders suggested that improving the matching of foster family homes with children's needs would also improve placement stability.

Determination and Discussion: Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 24 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children experienced multiple placement changes that did not further attainment of their goals or their treatment needs.
- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that the percentage of children experiencing no more than 2 placements in their first 12 months in foster care (77.8%) does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent or more.

According to information provided in the Statewide Assessment, children tend to experience greater placement stability when placed with relatives. This was based on a finding of a State study that 72.9 percent of children placed in kin homes had two or fewer placements, compared to 46.9 percent of children in non-kin foster homes. The Statewide Assessment also notes that children in California often are initially placed in an emergency shelter home or facility to allow the agency to make an in-depth assessment of the children's placement needs and to identify the most suitable placements. However, the case files reviewed indicated that placement changes resulted primarily from the agency's lack of attention to the foster parents' ability to meet the child's needs.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 25 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 7. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had established an appropriate permanency goal for the child in a timely manner. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 7 was rated Strength in 19 (76%) of the 25 applicable cases.
- Item 7 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 6 (24%) of the 25 applicable cases.

The case review found that the children in the 25 foster care cases had the following permanency goals:

- 11 children had the goal of reunification.
- 4 children had the goal of guardianship (For one child, the guardianship was with a non-relative).

- 1 child had a goal of permanent placement with relatives.
- 5 children had the goal of adoption.
- 4 children had a goal of “long-term foster care” leading to eventual emancipation to independent living.

At the time of the on-site review, 16 children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. TPR had been filed and attained in 4 of those 16 cases. For the 13 cases for which TPR had not been filed (despite the 15-month criterion being met), compelling reasons for not filing were noted in only 3 case files.

Cases were assigned a rating of Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the child's permanency goal was appropriate and had been established in a timely manner. Cases were assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the most recent goal was appropriate but the agency had not established the goal in a timely manner.

Stakeholders commenting on this area expressed the opinion that CDSS efforts to achieve permanency for younger children and children who are newly entering care have improved. Several stakeholders reported that there has been an emphasis on concurrent planning in the State and that it is being routinely implemented when the case involves younger children (one stakeholder said 6 years of age and younger; however, other stakeholders referred to children under age 3). Stakeholders said that courts and attorneys are strongly supportive of concurrent planning efforts and, in some areas, insist upon it. However, a few stakeholders suggested that there is still some confusion at both the agency and court levels regarding the concept of concurrent planning and how best to implement it. In addition, stakeholders were in general agreement that the agency is not as diligent in its efforts to achieve permanency for older children as it is for younger children.

State-level stakeholders noted that there have been great improvements in pursuing TPR. However, this was not supported by case review findings. The case reviews indicated that TPR had been filed in 4 of the 16 cases for which it was applicable; however, compelling reasons not to file were noted in only 3 cases.

Determination and Discussion: Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 24 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not established an appropriate goal for the child in a timely manner. According to the Statewide Assessment, all case plans for foster children who are being reunified must have a concurrent plan for permanency. However, there was little evidence of this in cases reviewed in Los Angeles County. The Statewide Assessment also notes that counties have developed a variety of strategies to ensure that permanency planning begins at the point of the child's removal from the home, including the following:

- Out-stationing adoption workers in offices and units of workers who are providing reunification services.
- Engaging in pre-dispositional concurrent planning case staffings with adoption workers.

- Recruiting prospective adoptive parents who will accept the risk of foster care placements.
- Increasing permanency mediation for birth families.
- Providing the option of post-adoptive contact agreements.
- Improving early search efforts for relatives who will commit to be permanent homes if it becomes clear that the child cannot be reunified with parents.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, California statutes require that children who are age 3 or older receive 12 months of reunification services, and children who are younger than age 3 receive 6 months of reunification services. However, reunification may be extended to a maximum of 18 months if the court determines there is a substantial likelihood that reunification will be successful within that extended period.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 8 was applicable for 16 cases. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had achieved the goals of reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives for the children in a timely manner or, if the goals had not been achieved in a timely manner, whether the agency had made, or was in the process of making, diligent efforts to achieve the goals. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 8 was rated as a Strength in 13 (81%) of the 16 applicable cases.
- Item 8 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (19%) of the 16 applicable cases.

The cases assessed for item 8 included 11 with a goal of reunification, 4 with a goal of guardianship, and 1 with a goal of permanent placement with relatives. Review findings with respect to these goals were the following:

- For the 11 cases with a goal of reunification, the goal was achieved in 8 cases, and in 1 of those cases, the goal was achieved within 12 months.
- For 3 of the 4 cases with a goal of guardianship, the goal had been achieved, but not within 12 months of the time of the child's entry into foster care.
- For the 1 case in which the goal was permanent placement with relatives, the goal was achieved, but not within 12 months of entry into foster care.

An additional finding was that the cases in which legal guardianship had been established remained as open cases in the child welfare agency's foster care system.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that the goal had been achieved in a timely manner or that the agency was making, or had made, concerted efforts to achieve the goal in a timely manner. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that the agency had not made adequate efforts to achieve the goal of reunification in a timely manner.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic were in general agreement that there have been increases in the number of legal guardianships with relatives. Some of these guardianships are moved out of the child welfare system to the State's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program, called "Kin-GAP." However, for many non-relatives with legal guardianship status, the children are not formally discharged from the foster care system so that they may continue to receive financial assistance and other services.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- In 19 percent of applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to attain the goals of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship in a timely manner.
- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that for FFY 2000, the percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (53.2%) does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent or more.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there were 20 counties in the State that met the national standard and another 24 counties performed at 60 percent or better. Eight counties were lower than 50 percent. In addition, researchers at the University of California at Berkeley identified large numbers of children who had been in a trial home visit for over 6 months and had never been discharged on CWS/CMS. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, increasing the extent to which discharge dates and reasons are completed in the CWS/CMS could substantially change California's performance on this data indicator.

The Statewide Assessment reports that some California counties have implemented innovative programs to help achieve timely reunification, including options that exit children into the care of relatives. Those programs include Wraparound Services, Family Conferencing, the Family-to-Family Initiative, and the Kinship Support Service Program.

Item 9. Adoption

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Five of the foster care cases were assessed for item 9. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether diligent efforts had been, or were being, made to achieve finalized adoptions in a timely manner. The results were the following:

- Item 9 was rated as a Strength in 3 (60%) of the 5 applicable cases.
- Item 9 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (40%) of the 5 applicable cases.

Of the 5 cases with a goal of adoption, adoption was finalized in 2 cases, and in 1 of these 2 cases, finalization took place within 24 months of the child's entry into foster care. Both of the children for whom adoption had been finalized were adopted by a relative. Two children with the goal of adoption are in adoptive placements with foster parents and it is anticipated that the adoption will be finalized within 24 months of the children's entry into foster care. Only one child is not in an adoptive placement and termination of parental rights has not been achieved for this child.

This item was assigned a rating of Strength when reviewers determined that diligent efforts had been made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner. This included the 1 case in which adoption was finalized within 24 months, and the 2 cases in which it was expected that adoption would be finalized within 24 months. One case was rated as Area Needing Improvement because reviewers determined that the agency had not actively pursued the goal of adoption. The other case was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the adoption extended beyond 24 months because agency paperwork was not completed in a timely manner.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic were in general agreement that the number of adoptions has increased in the recent past because of various adoption initiatives in the State. Stakeholders also noted that CDSS has become more aggressive in moving children to adoption as quickly as possible. However, most stakeholders, particularly in Los Angeles County, also expressed the opinion that there are still many barriers to achieving adoptions in a timely manner. One barrier identified by many stakeholders is that courts often are unwilling to approve a petition for TPR and child welfare agencies are unwilling to file for TPR, if the agency does not have an adoptive home ready to take the child. The argument provided to support this practice is that the agency and the courts do not want to create legal orphans. However, stakeholders remarked that many families are not willing to commit to adopting a child whose parental rights have not been terminated for fear that it may take years for TPR to be achieved or that TPR will not be granted.

Stakeholders in Los Angeles County noted the following additional barriers to adoptions in that county:

- Delays in finalizing adoptions after TPR due primarily to delays in the home study process.

- Belief among agency workers that services will cease when children are adopted, particularly independent living services.
- Belief among agency workers that older children are “unadoptable.”
- Belief among agency workers that the adoption assistance program does not include the same services and/or sufficient financial assistance as does foster care.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 2 out of 5 (40 percent) of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to achieve adoptions in a timely manner.
- Data from the State Data Profile indicate that the State's percentage of finalized adoptions in FFY 2000 that occurred within 24 months of removal from home (18.0%) does not meet the national standard of 32.0 percent or more.

According to the Statewide Assessment, although there have been significant accomplishments in adoption for children in foster care, barriers to achieving adoption in a timely manner remain. The Statewide Assessment identified several existing program efforts as improving the State’s capacity to achieve timely adoptions, including concurrent planning, permanency planning mediation, and kin adoption. It was noted that the following efforts are underway to further promote improvements in this area:

- Adoption Assistance Program (AAP): Regulations have been changed to allow the financially responsible county agency to pay AAP benefits based on that county’s foster care rates or the receiving county’s or receiving State’s rates, whichever is higher. This change will remove financial disincentives to adopting inter-jurisdictionally, thereby increasing potential adoptive placement resources.
- California has joined the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance. This compact allows children who are receiving State-only AAP benefits to be eligible for Medicaid benefits if the child and his or her family move to another State. Ensuring continuity of health care benefits, no matter where the adoptive family moves, will remove barriers inhibiting some families from considering adoption.
- The Private Adoption Agency Reimbursement Program rate has been increased from \$3,500 to \$5,000 for every AAP-eligible child who is adopted through a cooperative placement with a public adoption agency. This rate increase will encourage greater partnering between public and private adoption agencies to increase the number of available adoptive families.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Four of the foster care cases were assessed for item 10. In assessing these cases, reviewers were to determine if the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to assist children in attaining their goals related to other planned permanent living arrangements. The results were the following:

- Item 10 was rated as a Strength in 2 (50%) of the 4 applicable cases.
- Item 10 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (50%) of the 4 applicable cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the goal and the living arrangement met the child’s needs. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that other permanency goals (reunification, adoption, guardianship, or permanent placement with a relative) had not been sufficiently considered prior to establishing long-term foster care as the goal.

State-level stakeholders commented that the State has embraced a philosophy that long-term foster care is not a permanency goal. Other stakeholders commented that this goal is being used less often in the system. As one stakeholder noted: “Now most children who don’t reunify end up in adoption or guardianship instead of long-term foster care.” Stakeholders in all counties reported that there are multiple independent living services available but that the services provided are not consistent across or within counties. However, stakeholders reported that all youth under the care and supervision of the probation department are registered for, or have access to, independent living program services.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because, in 50 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made concerted efforts to ensure permanency for children with regard to alternative living options. The key problem was that the goal of long-term foster care was established without adequate exploration of other possible goals, such as adoption or guardianship.

Permanency Outcome 2

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	6	7	22	88.0
Partially Achieved:	2	0	0	2	8.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	1	1	4.0
Not Applicable:	14	6	4		

STATUS OF PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 88.0 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, five of the six items assessed for the outcome were assigned an overall rating of Strength and most of the stakeholders interviewed expressed positive opinions of the State's efforts with regard to achieving this outcome. However, taken together, the percentage of cases that were rated as having substantially achieved this outcome did not meet the required 90 percent. Key concerns identified pertained to the agency's performance with regard to preserving connections.

The findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Permanency Outcome 2 are presented and discussed below.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Of the 25 foster care cases, 23 were applicable for an assessment of item 11. Cases determined to be not applicable were those in which (1) TPR had been attained prior to the period under review, (2) contact with parents was not considered to be in the child's best interest, or (3) parents were deceased or whereabouts were unknown. In assessing item 11, reviewers were to

determine whether the child's foster care setting was in close proximity to the child's parents or close relatives. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 11 was rated a Strength in 22 (96%) of the 23 applicable cases.
- Item 11 was rated an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (4%) of the 23 applicable cases.

In the 22 cases rated as a Strength, the child either was placed in the same community or county as parents or relatives (17 cases), or placement in a different county was necessary to meet the child's needs (5 cases). For the one case rated as an Area Needing Improvement, reviewers determined that the child was not placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives because of a lack of placement resources available in that area. Reviewers noted that the distance of the child's placement facility was an obstacle to visitation with mother and siblings.

Some stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that CDSS emphasizes placement of children in the same community or county as their parents. They described the Family-to-Family initiative and placement with relatives as particularly effective approaches to keeping children in foster care in their own communities. Other stakeholders, however, reported that there are still children who are placed outside of their communities and these placements are a barrier to maintaining connections with parents.

Determination and Discussion: Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 96 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CDSS made diligent efforts to ensure that children's foster care placements were in close proximity to their parents or relatives.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Seventeen of the 25 foster care cases involved a child with siblings who were also in foster care. In assessing item 12, reviewers were to determine whether siblings were, or had been, placed together and, if not, whether separation was necessary to meet the needs (service or safety needs) of one or more of the children. This assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 12 was rated as a Strength in 16 (94%) of the 17 applicable cases.
- Item 12 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 1 (6%) of the 17 applicable cases.

In 16 of the 17 applicable cases, the child was in a placement with at least one other sibling, and in 12 of these cases, the child was in a placement with all siblings. Reviewers determined that in all but one case, the children's separation from some or all siblings was necessary to meet the treatment needs of one of the siblings. In the one case rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item,

reviewers determined that the child was not placed with his siblings because the home in which his siblings had been placed did not have room for him.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that CDSS makes concerted efforts to place siblings together and to reunite siblings if they initially are separated. Use of relatives as placement resources was reported to facilitate placement of siblings together.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 94 percent of the cases, siblings were placed together, or their separation was deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children. According to the Statewide Assessment, placing siblings together is an agency priority unless there is documented evidence that doing so is detrimental to one of the children. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, data generated by researchers at the University of California at Berkeley reported the following findings:

- 61 percent of children in foster care who have one or more siblings are placed with at least one sibling.
- Sibling groups are more likely to remain together when placed in the home of a relative (78.3%) than when they are placed in a non-relative foster home (57.6% if in a foster family home; 61.7% if in a foster family agency home).

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 13 was applicable for 20 of the 25 foster care cases. Four cases were rated as not applicable because there were no siblings in foster care and the parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. One case was rated as Not Applicable because the child was in foster care for only 24 hours. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine (1) whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to facilitate visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings in foster care and (2) whether these visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of children and families. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 13 was rated as a Strength in 18 (90%) of the 20 applicable cases.
- Item 13 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (10%) of the 20 applicable cases.

The case review process revealed the following visitation patterns between children and their mothers in the 20 applicable cases:

- Weekly visits - 8 cases.
- Twice a month visits - 3 cases.
- Monthly visits – 2 cases.

- Less than monthly visits - 4 cases.
- No visits – 3 cases.

In five of the seven cases in which there were no visits between the mother and child or visits occurred on a less than monthly basis, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Fathers were more likely than mothers to be identified as not applicable for this assessment because they could not be located (despite diligent efforts) or because visits between children and fathers were deemed to be not in the child's best interest. Typical visitation patterns between children and their fathers for the 14 applicable cases were the following:

- Weekly visits – 2 cases.
- Twice a month visits - 3 cases.
- Monthly visits – 4 cases.
- No visits – 5 cases.

In all cases in which there were no visits between the father and child, reviewers determined that the agency had made concerted efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Typical visitation patterns between siblings for the 4 applicable cases were the following:

- Twice a month visits – 1 case.
- Monthly visits - 1 case.
- Less than monthly visits - 2 cases.

In both of the cases in which sibling visits occurred less than monthly, reviewers determined that the agency had made efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visitation occurred at least once a month, or that, when visitation was less frequent, the agency had made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation. The two cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item because reviewers determined that visitation between the child and mother was less frequent than once a month and the agency had not made diligent efforts to promote more frequent visitation.

Most stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the agency makes concerted efforts to support visitation with parents and siblings. A few stakeholders noted that visitation is increased as the family moves closer to reunification. However, some stakeholders expressed concern about whether visitation between children and parents is adequately supervised. Other stakeholders noted that the duration of visitation often is limited to only 1 hour, which they viewed as insufficient to promote reunification.

Determination and Discussion: Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 90 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation, particularly among siblings in foster care. According to the Statewide Assessment, a CDSS mail survey of California’s county child welfare agencies and juvenile probation departments revealed that most respondents arrange for visitation between children and their parents, siblings, and grandparents.

Item 14. Preserving connections

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Item 14 was applicable for assessment in all 25 foster care cases. In assessing item 14, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made, or was making, diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections to neighborhood, community, heritage, family, faith, and friends while the child was in foster care. The assessment resulted in the following findings:

- Item 14 was rated as a Strength in 21 (84%) of the 25 applicable cases.
- Item 14 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 4 (16%) of the 25 applicable cases.

Reviewers indicated that in 21 of the 25 cases, children's primary connections had been “significantly” preserved while they were in foster care; in 4 of the 25 cases, children’s primary connections had been “partially” preserved.

Cases were rated as a Strength for this item when reviewers determined that critical primary connections were significantly preserved. For the four cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item, reviewers determined the following:

- The agency and foster parents were not assisting the child in maintaining connections to his racial heritage (1 case).
- The placement facility was not assisting the child in remaining connected to extended family and/or friends (3 cases).

State-level stakeholders expressed the opinion that maintaining connections for children who are Native American is difficult and many children are not placed with relatives or other Tribal members. State stakeholders reported that there are very few Tribal courts and that notification of Tribes sometimes is difficult because Tribal contacts rotate frequently and staff may not always have up-to-date contact information. The CDSS recently established a State-level Tribal unit to facilitate coordination with Tribes. County-level stakeholders expressed concern that responses from Tribes and/or the Bureau of Indian Affairs are not always timely and that Tribal contact information in CWS/CMS is not kept up-to-date. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that there is a courtroom dedicated to hearing Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases and that the court has signs placed in front of every courtroom reminding parents to notify the court if they are of Native American heritage. Los Angeles County stakeholders also noted that the county child welfare agency has an American Indian Unit and when a Native American child is identified, the case is transferred to that unit.

Determination and Discussion: Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 16 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to preserve children's connections. Although this was not an area of egregious weakness, the State needs to ensure that children maintain connections to community, heritage, faith, extended family, and friends.

Item 15. Relative placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: Twenty-four of the 25 foster care cases were applicable for an assessment of item 15. One case was not applicable because the judge ordered that the child be placed in a drug treatment facility. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives (both maternal and paternal relatives) as potential placement resources for children in foster care. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 15 was rated as a Strength in 21 (87.5%) of the 24 applicable cases.
- Item 15 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 3 (12.5%) of the 24 applicable cases.

Cases were rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children were placed with relatives (8 cases), had been previously placed with relatives (4 cases), or were not placed with relatives but the agency had made diligent efforts to seek relatives and assess them as placement resources (9 cases).

This item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to search for relatives as placement resources and reasons for not seeking relatives were not noted in the case file nor identified during case-related interviews.

Most stakeholders commenting on this topic reported that the agency is highly effective in placing children with relatives and supporting those placements with services. Stakeholders reported that judges were noted to encourage placement with relatives and ask families to identify relatives at the initial hearing. Other stakeholders, however, voiced concerns that relatives are not being identified as placement resources as quickly as they should be.

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 87.5 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources. According to the

Statewide Assessment, CDSS considers placement options in the following order of priority: non-custodial parent, relatives, tribal members (if applicable), foster family, and group home. The Statewide Assessment also notes that California places children with relatives at a higher rate than any other placement option.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 16 was applicable for 21 of the 25 foster care cases. A case was considered not applicable for an assessment of this item if parental rights had been terminated and parents were no longer involved with the child or if a relationship with the parents was considered to be not in the child's best interests. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had made diligent efforts to support or maintain the bond between the child and both of his/her parents through visitation and provision of services that promote bonding. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 16 was rated as a Strength in 19 (90%) of the 21 applicable cases.
- Item 16 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (10%) of the 21 applicable cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that (1) there was a strong bond between the parent and the child that the agency supported or (2) there was not a strong bond between the parent and the child, but the agency made concerted efforts to promote bonding. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that the agency did not promote parental involvement with the child to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue expressed the opinion that the agency makes diligent efforts to promote strong parent-child relationships.

Determination and Discussion: Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because reviewers determined that in 90 percent of applicable cases, the agency provided adequate services to support the parent-child relationships of children in foster care.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well Being Outcome 1

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	15	8	6	29	59.2
Partially Achieved:	9	4	6	19	38.8
Not Achieved or Addressed:	1	0	0	1	2.0
Not Applicable:	0	0	0		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 59.2 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

An overall CFSR finding was that CDSS is not consistent in meeting the service needs of children and families. In addition, although State policy requires parent participation in the case-planning process, parents and children (when appropriate) were not involved in case planning in 47 percent of the cases reviewed. Finally, although case reviewers determined that caseworkers visited children with sufficient frequency to ensure their safety and well-being (particularly children in foster care), in many cases, visits with parents were determined to be of insufficient frequency and quality to ensure children's safety and promote attainment of case goals.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 1 are presented and discussed below.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 17 was applicable for all 49 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether the agency had (1) adequately assessed the needs of children, parents, and foster parents; and (2) provided the services necessary to meet those needs. The results were the following:

- Item 17 was rated as a Strength in 32 (65%) of the 49 applicable cases (18 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 17 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 17 (35%) of the 49 applicable cases (7 of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers made the following determinations from the case reviews:

- There were three cases in which reviewers determined that the services provided were not appropriate for the child's needs.
- Mothers' needs were assessed in 41 of the 48 cases for which an assessment of mothers' needs was applicable (assessment of mother's needs was considered not applicable if the mother could not be located despite a diligent search) and services were provided in 38 cases.
- Fathers' needs were assessed in 24 of the 31 cases for which an assessment of fathers' needs was applicable (assessment of father's needs was considered not applicable if the father could not be located despite a diligent search or the father did not want to be involved in the child's life) and services were provided in all 24 cases.
- Foster parents' (including relative caregivers) needs were assessed in all 16 of the cases in which the child was placed with a foster family or relative, and services were provided in all 16 cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the needs of children, parents, and foster parents had been adequately assessed and that identified service needs had been met.

A rating of Area Needing Improvement was assigned when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- Children's needs were not assessed and/or services to address identified needs were not provided (8 cases).
- The services provided were not adequate to meet the needs of parents and/or children (7 cases).
- Parent's needs were not assessed and/or services to address needs were not provided (11 cases).

Although there were no cases in which reviewers determined that the needs of foster parents and relative caregivers had not been addressed, stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that foster parents and relative caregivers are not always adequately supported and “desperately” need services such as respite care and in-home training and assistance from mental and

physical health professionals to care for special needs children. Other stakeholders reported that with regard to services for children, there is a lack of “high-end” mental health services, making it difficult for the child welfare agency to respond to children's mental health needs when they escalate. In addition, stakeholders stated that the agency does not pay enough attention to what goes on in foster homes. These stakeholders noted that in some foster homes, there is not enough food or there is only very low quality food, children are not getting shoes, and foster parents are not taking adequate care of the children.

Determination and Discussion: Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 35 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not adequately assessed and/or addressed the service needs of children and parents. Although there were no cases in which reviewers found that CDSS had not addressed the needs of foster parents, several stakeholders commented that the agency is not paying sufficient attention to addressing caregiver’s needs for respite services and in-home assistance to address a child’s behavioral/mental and physical health issues.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 18 was applicable for all 49 cases. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether parents (including pre-adoptive parents or permanent caregivers) and children (if age-appropriate) had been involved in the case planning process, and if not, whether their involvement was contrary to the child's best interest. A determination of involvement in case planning required that a parent or child had actively participated in identifying the services and goals included in the case plan. This assessment produced the following findings:

- Item 18 was rated as a Strength in 26 (53%) of the 49 cases (15 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 18 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 23 (47%) of the 49 cases (10 of which were foster care cases).

In assessing this item, reviewers made the following determinations:

- Mothers were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 28 cases. In 19 cases, the mother was not involved but should have been. There were two cases in which the mother was not available to participate.
- Fathers were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 14 cases. In 16 cases the father was not involved but should have been. There were 16 cases in which the father was not available to participate, and 3 cases in which the father's participation was considered to be contrary to the child's best interest.
- Children were appropriately involved in the case planning process in 18 cases. In 13 cases, children were not involved, although reviewers determined that they were old enough to have been involved. There were 18 cases in which reviewers determined that the children were not old enough to participate in the case planning process.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that all relevant parties had actively participated in the case planning process. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined the following:

- The agency did not involve all of the relevant parties (i.e., the mother, father, and child) in the case planning process and reviewers determined that all of these parties should have been involved (i.e., children were old enough) (10 cases).
- The agency did not involve the mother and father in the case planning process and reviewers determined that both mothers and fathers were available to participate, although the child was considered too young to participate (8 cases).
- The agency involved the parents but not the child, and reviewers determined that the child was old enough to have been involved (3 cases).
- The agency involved the child in the case planning process, but not the parents, and reviewers determined that parents should have been involved (2 cases).

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that when the family is engaged in family group decision making, they tend to be involved in the case planning process. However, when this approach is not used, there is no other formal mechanism for involving parents in case planning. Consequently, workers are not consistent in their efforts to involve parents. Several stakeholders attributed this to the fact that the high number of cases carried by workers prohibits them from involving families in case planning. It is more time-efficient for them to develop a case plan and then present it to the parents.

Determination and Discussion: Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 47 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to involve parents and/or children in the case planning process. This finding is not consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, California has embraced an agency philosophy that a strength-based approach to families is the most effective method of engaging parents in case planning (i.e., identifying strengths and needs, determining goals and requesting services). Counties are exercising a variety of options to bring family-centered models and concurrent resources to their communities. The Statewide Assessment notes that practices such as family decision-making models, wraparound services, and dependency or permanency planning mediation are being used with increased frequency throughout California. However, evidence of the frequent use of these practices was not apparent in the cases reviewed.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: All 49 cases were applicable for an assessment of item 19. In conducting this assessment, reviewers were to determine whether the frequency of visits between the caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and whether visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The results of the assessment were the following:

- Item 19 was rated as a Strength in 44 (90%) of the 49 applicable cases (25 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 19 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 5 (10%) of the 49 applicable cases (none of which were foster care cases).

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 25 foster care cases:

- In 4 cases, visits typically occurred once a week.
- In 5 cases, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 16 cases, visits typically occurred once a month.

Reviewers noted the following with respect to frequency of visits for the 24 in-home services cases:

- In 2 cases, visits occurred once a week.
- In 1 case, visits typically occurred twice a month.
- In 19 cases visits typically occurred once a month.
- In 2 cases visits typically occurred less frequently than once a month.

Item 19 was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being and promote attainment of case goals. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined one or more of the following:

- The frequency of caseworker visits with children was not sufficient to meet the needs of the child (2 cases).
- The frequency of caseworker visits was sufficient, but the visits did not focus on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment (3 cases).
- Children were not visited in their home or placement environments (2 cases).

Determination and Discussion: Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 90 percent of the cases reviewers determined that caseworker visits with children were of sufficient frequency and/or quality.¹ This is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, except for the first month when more frequent contact is required, the caseworker is mandated to visit the child at least monthly, whether the child is in the home or in an out-of-home placement. The percentage of counties passing the compliance reviews on making monthly contacts with the child improved from 69 percent in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1998/1999 to 90 percent in SFY 2001/2002. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that compliance reviews identify and report if the child was seen by a caseworker within the required timeframe, not the quality of that contact. According to the Statewide Assessment, reducing caseworker caseloads would improve both the quantity and quality of the monthly contacts.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 20 was applicable for 44 of the 49 cases. There were five foster care cases that were not applicable for this assessment because TPR had been attained for the parents and parents were no longer involved in the lives of the children. Reviewers were to assess whether the caseworker had sufficient face-to-face contact with the children's mothers and fathers to promote attainment of case goals and/or ensure the children's safety and well being. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 20 was rated as a Strength in 36 (82%) of the 44 cases (17 of which were foster care cases).

¹ During the week following the on-site review, the *Los Angeles Daily News* issued an article stating that “nearly 500 foster children have disappeared from Los Angeles County’s troubled child-welfare system, most of them believed to have been abducted by relative or guardians...” Subsequently, we learned that Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services had issued a September 27, 2002 letter to its County Board of Supervisors in response to an internal county audit report that found that “data problems with the child welfare computer system precluded the Department from locating a foster child approximately 8 percent of the time.” The letter indicated that “...the data problems were actually instances of problems/delays in updating the system.” The letter further indicated that “there was no instance in the sample in which a child’s whereabouts was actually unknown to the social worker handling the child’s case.” The letter identified 488 children in runaway status and 252 children classified as abducted by a parent/relative/guardian. None of the stakeholders interviewed during the on-site phase of the CFSR raised the findings of the audit or the subsequent analyses the county provided to its Board of Supervisors regarding the children reported as missing because they are either on runaway status or were abducted by parents. In 90 percent of the cases reviewed from the random sample of cases selected for the CFSR, worker contact with the children in the cases was determined to be adequate; that is our basis for rating this item a Strength.

- Item 20 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 8 (18%) of the 44 cases (3 of which were foster care cases).

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with mothers were the following (44 applicable cases):

- Weekly visits - 5 cases.
- Twice a month visits - 3 cases.
- Monthly visits - 24 cases.
- Less than monthly visits - 10 cases.
- No visits – 2 cases.

Typical patterns of caseworker visits with fathers were the following (31 applicable cases).

- Weekly visits - 1 case.
- Twice a month visits - 2 cases.
- Monthly visits - 14 cases.
- Less than monthly visits - 14 cases.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that visits occurred with sufficient frequency to meet the needs of parents and children and that visits focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery, and goal attainment. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that visits were not sufficiently frequent to meet the needs of parents and children (5 cases); visits were of sufficient frequency, but did not focus on substantive issues pertaining to the case (2 cases); or visits were not of sufficient frequency or quality (1 case).

Determination and Discussion: This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 18 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to promote the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals.

Well-Being Outcome 2

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	15	6	9	30	81.1
Partially Achieved:	1	2	0	3	8.1
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	1	1	4	10.8
Not Applicable:	7	3	2		

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2 based on the finding that 81.1 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome. This is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Although California did not achieve substantial conformity with this outcome, the general CFSR finding was that in a large percentage of cases, CDSS was consistent in assessing children's educational needs and providing appropriate services to meet those needs. However, in some cases, although educational needs were assessed, services were not provided to meet identified needs. The findings for the item assessed for Well Being Outcome 2 are presented below.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 21 was applicable for 37 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for assessment were foster care cases in which the children were too young to be enrolled in school or preschool, or in-home services cases in which the children did not have needs pertaining to education-related issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether children's educational needs were appropriately assessed and whether services were provided to meet those needs. The results of this assessment were the following:

- Item 21 was rated as a Strength in 30 (81%) of the 37 applicable cases (18 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 21 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 7 (19%) of the 37 applicable cases (2 of which were foster care cases).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that the agency had assessed the children's educational needs and had provided services to meet those needs (if necessary). The item was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement when educational needs were identified, but services were not provided to address identified needs.

Reviewers reported the following additional findings with respect to this item:

- ◆ Educational needs were assessed in 30 of the 37 applicable cases and services were provided in 24 cases.
- ◆ Educational services included tutoring, IEP meetings, special education, early intervention, and advocacy.
- ◆ School records were included in 24 of the applicable cases.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic suggested that the agency is involved in efforts to ensure that children's educational needs are met. However, stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the school system is not consistently responsive to the needs of children in foster care and foster parents and agency workers have to be strong advocates to ensure that children's educational needs are met by the schools. Stakeholders suggested that foster parents and caseworkers need assistance and training on how to successfully advocate for their children with the school system.

Determination and Discussion: Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 19 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made diligent efforts to meet the educational needs of children. According to the Statewide Assessment, there is a Foster Youth Services program, established at the State Department of Education. This program is designed to improve the school system's capacity to meet the educational needs of children in foster care. The Statewide Assessment also notes that this is the goal of several partnerships that exist among local county child welfare agencies, the local school system, and community-based service agencies.

Well-Being Outcome 3

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Los Angeles	Stanislaus	San Mateo	Total	Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	15	9	11	35	77.8
Partially Achieved:	3	2	1	6	13.3
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	1	0	4	8.9
Not Applicable:	4	0	0	4	

STATUS OF WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 77.8 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

In general, the CFSR found that CDSS was highly effective in meeting children's physical health needs, but was less consistent in its efforts to address children's mental health needs, particularly for children in the in-home services cases. A key concern identified by stakeholders is that mental health services are not always of sufficient quality to address children's mental health needs.

Findings pertaining to the specific items assessed under Well-Being Outcome 3 are presented and discussed below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 22 was applicable for 42 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable for this assessment were in-home services cases with no need to address physical health issues. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) children's physical health needs had been appropriately assessed and (2) the services designed to meet those needs had been, or were being, provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 22 was rated as a Strength in 40 (95%) of the 42 applicable cases (24 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 22 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 2 (5%) of the 42 applicable cases (1 of which was a foster care case).

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers determined that children's health needs were routinely assessed and services provided as needed. Both cases rated as an Area Needing Improvement on this indicator were due to the agency not assisting the family in obtaining needed medical assistance.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic indicated that the agency is effective in meeting the physical health needs of children in both foster care and in-home services cases. Stakeholders expressed the opinion that access to medical care is not generally a problem, with the exception of finding dentists who will accept Medi-Cal, the State's Title XIX Medicaid Program.

Determination and Discussion: Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 95 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases. Overall, medical and dental services were accessible, services were provided, and documentation was thorough.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State CWS Compliance reviews identify and report whether the health information is provided to caregivers and whether medical and dental exams are timely. Findings indicate that the great majority of children/youth receive a mandatory health examination as they enter out-of-home care. The Statewide Assessment notes that preliminary data regarding dental exams indicated that these were not always completed in a timely manner. However, dental exams were provided in timely manner in all of the applicable cases reviewed during the onsite CFSR.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that there are approximately 212 Public Health Nurses (PHNs) statewide who oversee the provision of physical, mental, and dental health care to children in foster care, including children in out-of-county and out-of-State placements. The PHNs are co-located in the county welfare and probation departments.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Review Findings: An assessment of item 23 was applicable for 35 of the 49 cases reviewed. Cases that were not applicable were foster care cases in which the child was too young for an assessment of mental health needs and in-home services cases in which the children's mental health needs were not an issue. In assessing this item, reviewers were to determine whether (1) mental health needs had been appropriately assessed and (2) appropriate services to address those needs had been offered or provided. The findings of this assessment were the following:

- Item 23 was rated as a Strength in 26 (74%) of the 35 applicable cases (18 of which were foster care cases).
- Item 23 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement in 9 (26%) of the 35 applicable cases (1 of which was a foster care cases).

For the 35 applicable cases, reviewers noted that children's mental health needs were "significantly assessed" in 26 cases, "partially assessed" in 6 cases, and "not at all assessed" in 3 cases. Reviewers also reported that mental health service needs were "significantly met" in 24 cases, "partially met" in 6 cases, and "not at all" met in 3 cases. In two cases, the mental health assessment resulted in a finding that services were not needed.

This item was rated as a Strength when reviewers noted that mental health needs were "significantly" assessed and the children's mental health needs were "significantly" met. The item was rated as an Area Needing Improvement when reviewers determined that assessments and services were provided only partially or not at all. A key finding was that the agency did not pay sufficient attention to the mental health needs of children in the in-home services cases.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed the opinion that there are insufficient mental health services available to children and families, particularly when children are not in foster care. Stakeholders also noted that there is a serious lack of "high end" mental health services for children with severe mental health problems and voiced concern about the quality of the mental health services that children do receive. They reported that counseling and therapy services often only address superficial issues and many mental health providers do not have the necessary skills to address underlying problems and issues. Los Angeles County stakeholders noted that there are waiting lists for mental health services that can extend up to nine months.

Determination and Discussion: Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the finding that in 26 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that CDSS had not made concerted efforts to address the mental health needs of children. Most of these cases involved children receiving services while remaining in their homes. According to the Statewide Assessment, there is little information about the mental health treatment needs of children in foster care. Also, the number of foster care youth moving into adult mental health systems is not available and collaborative data collection among State agencies on the variety of mental health needs for children and youth in foster care is absent.

SECTION 2: SYSTEMIC FACTORS

I. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

STATUS OF STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Statewide Information System.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 24 is rated as a Strength because information on the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for each child in foster care is retrievable from the State's automated child welfare system. This item does not evaluate whether the State's automated system meets the Federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) functional requirements, but only whether the automated system can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals of foster care children.

According to the Statewide Assessment, California's automated Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) became operational in all 58 counties and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Adoption Program district offices on December 31, 1997. Although county probation officers do not have direct access to CWS/CMS, probation data are input centrally at the CDSS. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the CWS/CMS:

- Provides the status, demographics, location, and goals for all children in foster care.
- Is a valuable tool for caseworkers and State and county administrators.
- Reduces the time and effort required to document cases and services, and make referrals, compared to the previous paper-based documentation systems.
- Provides immediate and easy access to case history, previous referrals, and information from other counties.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that a CWS/CMS “Tune-Up” has been developed to improve the amount and accuracy of information entered into CWS/CMS. A series of county-specific reports from the CWS/CMS database are generated that identify the extent of application use and, in some reports, determine the timeliness and/or quality of data input, e.g., caseworker contacts, case plan, referrals, and court and supervisor approvals. In addition the Statewide Assessment notes that there has been a decrease in AFCARS reporting errors from 33 of the 103 AFCARS foster care data elements in error in March 1998 to 3 in March of 2001.

The Statewide Assessment identifies the following improvements and training as needed to further enhance CWS/CMS:

- Upgrading software and hardware to enhance access from the field.
- Streamlining the data input process to give staff more time to work with children and families.
- Making the system faster, more intuitive, and consistent with changing program requirements.
- Improving training availability and accessibility.

Stakeholders commenting on this area were in general agreement that CWS/CMS is an effective information system and can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for children in foster care. Stakeholders also noted that the system provides information on child abuse and neglect histories across county lines. Additional positive aspects of the system identified by stakeholders included the following:

- The system is accessible on a 24-hour basis.
- The data are useful to managers and administrators in developing policies and practices.
- The system is useful for supervisors to manage workloads and track workers’ caseloads.
- The system generates consistent reports, particularly court reports.
- The system can be used to review case plans and conduct worker compliance reviews.
- The system includes medical and educational information.
- Once the system is accessed, it is user friendly.
- Technical support is readily accessible (although in one of the counties included in the review, technical support was identified as a concern).

Despite the mostly positive perceptions of the CWS/CMS, a few stakeholders suggested that new workers experience difficulty with the system because it takes a long time to learn how to use it properly. However, most stakeholders reported that once workers adapt to the system, they like it. Other stakeholders voiced concern that the system is not effectively linked to other systems, particularly probation. Stakeholders also commented that although the system has the capacity to collect information on health, education, and well being, workers are not entering this information on a consistent basis.

II. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2 X	3	4

STATUS OF CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

California is not in substantial conformity with the factor of Case Review System. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although State statutes require caseworkers to develop case plans and to involve parents in the development process, there is no statewide protocol in place to ensure parent and child participation in developing the case plan. In 47 percent of the cases reviewed during the CFSR, parents (and children, when appropriate) were not involved in developing the case plan.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS requires that approved written case plans must be completed within 30 days of the child's removal from the parent and updated as needed, but no less frequently than once every 6 months. A written case plan also is required for all in-home cases, whether voluntary or court-ordered. State statute mandates that the written case plan be part of the

court report and submitted as evidence into the record at the initial hearing and at all 6-month reviews. The Statewide Assessment also notes that State statute requires that “whenever possible” the parents shall participate in case plan development. According to the Statewide Assessment, case reviews conducted by the CDSS as part of the State’s self-assessment process indicate that virtually all cases have case plans and that parental participation in the case planning process is a consistent and widespread practice. However, this information is not consistent with the CFSR on-site case review finding that parents (and children, when appropriate) were not involved in the case-planning process in 47 percent of the 49 cases reviewed.

The Statewide Assessment information regarding parent involvement in case planning also is not consistent with the opinions of stakeholders interviewed during the on-site CFSR. In general, stakeholders noted that when there is a clear protocol or method for involving families, such as Family Group Decision Making, parents are involved. However, if there is no protocol or method, it is rare that families are involved in the case-planning process. According to many of the stakeholders and case reviewers, the most common approach to the case-planning process appears to be one in which the caseworker prepares the plan and then presents it to the family. Most stakeholders expressed the opinion that when families are not involved in case planning, it is usually because caseworkers do not have the necessary time to engage families due to their large caseloads. However, a few stakeholders noted that some families do not participate in case planning because their attorneys advise them not to.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 26 is rated as a Strength because the State has statutory and regulatory requirements for conducting 6-month periodic reviews and these reviews usually are completed in a timely manner.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in dependency cases, the Dispositional Hearing (the hearing that determines whether the child should be declared a dependent of the court) serves as the first periodic case review and the point at which the court makes determinations on all required Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) elements. The court must hold subsequent periodic status review hearings no less frequently than every 6 months from the date of the original Dispositional Hearing. The required ASFA determinations are reviewed at each subsequent 6-month review hearing for the life of the foster care case. In delinquency cases, the date the child enters foster care triggers the first periodic case plan review, which continues every 6 months until termination of the case.

The Statewide Assessment notes that State statute permits administrative reviews rather than court hearings to be conducted for the 6-month status reviews between the annual court permanency hearings. Six counties in California use this option: Kern, Monterey, Sacramento, Santa Cruz, Shasta, and Stanislaus. However, if the permanent plan is adoption or legal guardianship, only the court can conduct the 6-month status reviews.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, although 6-month reviews usually are completed in a timely manner, the high caseloads of the courts and the agencies sometime result in conditions that necessitate continuances, which delay the reviews or hearings. The California Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) project provides training and technical assistance to court personnel on the importance of permanency for children and the negative effects of delayed hearings and reviews on children's well being. This helps to focus attention on the need for hearings to be held in a timely manner.

Stakeholders commenting on this area were in general agreement that periodic reviews are occurring in a timely manner and that the JRTA activities have contributed to progress in this area. In addition, stakeholders in one county noted that reviews are held more frequently than every 6 months for children who are younger than 3 years old. Some stakeholders, however, did express concern that court continuances are still occurring and that they are a barrier to timely completion of reviews. Several stakeholders expressed the opinion that the hearings and reviews often are too brief to address permanency issues in depth

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 27 was rated as a Strength because the State has statutory or regulatory requirements that permanency hearings be held every 12 months and these hearings usually are held in accordance with this requirement.

According to the Statewide Assessment, California statute mandates that a permanency hearing be held within 12 months after the date the child enters foster care or immediately, at the Dispositional Hearing, if reunification services are not ordered. Although the Statewide Assessment indicates that permanency hearings usually are held in a timely manner, the following suggestions were offered for improving the 12-month permanency hearings:

- Provide more training for mediators on permanency planning.
- Enforce the 10-day rule for court reports. (Most reports are given to the parties immediately before the hearing, which does not allow enough time for the reports to be reviewed by the parties' lawyers, who then request continuances.)

- Enforce strict standards for continuing services at the Permanency hearing.

Stakeholders commenting on this area during the on-site phase of the review reported that hearings usually are held every 12 months. In one county, however, stakeholders reported that there can be delays in the 12-month hearing due to the following factors:

- The quality and timeliness of reports submitted by the agency (and by other relevant parties) to the court,
- The individual judge's perception of the importance of the 12-month hearing, and/or
- The timeliness of the agency's notification to all relevant parties of the hearing date.

Several stakeholders also noted that the permanency review process is accelerated for children who are younger than 3 years old.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 28 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has statutory and regulatory requirements for terminating parental rights (TPR) for children in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, when TPR is not sought, the agency is not consistent in documenting reasons for not filing for TPR. In addition, often the agency will not seek TPR, and/or the court will not grant TPR, unless an adoptive home for the child has been identified and the pre-adoptive home demonstrates a readiness to adopt. These practices are not in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

According to the Statewide Assessment, case plans for foster children who are being reunified must have a concurrent permanency plan. At the initial permanency hearing, the court determines if reasonable services were offered and/or whether additional time-limited reunification services should be ordered. If no additional time-limited reunification services are ordered and the child cannot be immediately returned home, then the court must determine the alternative permanent plan for the child. If the plan is adoption or guardianship, the hearing to TPR or establish the guardianship is scheduled for 120 days later. If there are compelling reasons at this juncture for not terminating parental rights, then the court establishes the alternate planned permanent living arrangement (i.e., long-term foster care) as the child's permanency goal.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, for FFY 2000, the State calculated that 32 percent of the foster care population that has been in care 17 of the most recent 22 months has not had parental rights terminated. Seventy-one percent of these children are 11 years of age or older. This fact suggests that many of these children may have declined to be adopted or have emotional or behavioral issues that must be resolved prior to readiness for adoption. The Statewide Assessment notes that a fundamental tenet of adoption in California is

the belief that parental rights should not be terminated unless it is highly likely that the child will be adopted. As a result, most children are living with the family that will adopt them by the time parental rights are terminated.

The information in the Statewide Assessment regarding TPR is consistent with information from the case reviews. At the time of the on-site review, 16 children had been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. Terminating parental rights had been filed in four (24%) of those cases. For the 12 cases for which TPR had not been filed despite the 15-month criterion being met, compelling reasons for not filing were present in only 3 of the 12 case files.

Stakeholders commenting on this area were in general agreement that the State is not consistent in seeking TPR in accordance with the provisions of ASFA. Some stakeholders suggested that the reason for this lack of consistency is that the State has a policy that if, after 12 months in foster care, a compelling reason is identified that reunification is possible prior to 18 months, the family is given another 6 months to achieve case goals. Most stakeholders, however, reported that the lack of consistency is due to that fact that many judges and child welfare agency personnel are reluctant to terminate parental rights unless the agency already has an adoptive home for the child, the home study is completed, and the family is ready to adopt the child.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 29 is rated as a Strength because the State provides a process for notifying foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers of reviews and hearings and affords them opportunities to be heard in any review or hearing.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, State statute requires that notice of court hearings “. . . shall be mailed by the social worker to the foster parents, relative caregivers, community care facility, or the foster family agency having physical custody of the child.” Similar notice is required for any administrative review convened in lieu of a court hearing. Notice also is provided to the child's parents or legal guardian, the counsels of record, and the child (if older than 10 years). In addition, the caseworker and probation officer must, at least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing, “provide a summary of recommendations for disposition” to the child's attorney, any court-appointed child advocate, foster parents, relative caregivers, or pre-adoptive parents.

According to the Statewide Assessment, many caregivers do not participate in the court or review processes. Participants in a foster parent focus group convened as part of the State's self-assessment process reported that their caseworkers often tell them that they do not need to appear. These foster parents also noted that they do not receive notification of the hearings. The Statewide Assessment

indicates that the Center for Families, Children and the Courts has been providing training to the courts and caregivers to improve participation in the review process. In addition, the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee has recommended that the Judicial Council of California approve a proposed Caregiver Information Form (JV-290) for use by caregivers who wish to submit information to the juvenile court. The proposed form is intended to provide caregivers with a structured format in which to present information.

Stakeholders interviewed during the on-site phase of the CFSR were in general agreement that foster parents and pre-adoptive parents receive notification of court hearings and administrative reviews. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that foster parents actively participate in hearings and that judges are responsive to what foster parents have to say. In addition, stakeholders in one county reported that foster parents can complete a standardized form to submit to the judge when they cannot attend a hearing. However, other stakeholders reported that although foster parents usually receive notification of hearings, the agency does not always encourage them to attend and often does not address possible impediments to attendance, such as providing child care.

III. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

California is not in compliance with the systemic factor of Quality Assurance System. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 30 is rated as a Strength because the State has established standards to protect the safety and health of children and mechanisms to ensure adherence to the standards.

According to the Statewide Assessment, Division 31 of the State's Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures sets forth the requirements for services provided to children in foster care. In addition, California's Health and Safety Code, Welfare and Institutions Code and Title 22 regulations specify levels and standards of care for children in various placement settings. Mechanisms to ensure that standards are implemented appropriately include the Foster Care Ombudsman Program, grievance procedures, complaint investigations, State fair hearings, licensing compliance system, and child welfare services compliance reviews. The State also certifies and monitors out-of-State facilities where California children are placed.

Los Angeles County stakeholders commenting on this topic reported that there is a county quality assurance (QA) system that assesses risk to all children in foster homes and group care facilities. However, stakeholders in this county noted that improvements are needed in the initial screening process for foster homes. Los Angeles County stakeholders said that if there is a maltreatment report in a home or facility, the county quality assurance division conducts an on-site visit within 10 days or immediately if the social worker has not responded and determines the appropriate action. Stakeholders in another county indicated that the agency responds to reports of maltreatment in foster care within 24 hours.

Stakeholders in one county reported that the State's Division 31 compliance review tool is used to review every case over a 2 to 3-month period to ensure compliance with some Division 31 standards. State-level stakeholders noted that the State has standards in place regulating use of restraints or seclusion for children in foster care and conducts an annual review of facilities for health and safety requirements.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 31 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has a quality assurance (QA) system, the primary QA activity – the Division 31 compliance review system – assesses compliance with only six factors and does not assess the effectiveness and quality of services delivered.

According to the Statewide Assessment, there are a number of State and agency activities designed to ensure and evaluate the quality of services, including the following:

- Conducting reviews, (i.e., Division 31 Compliance reviews, Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) reviews, annual licensing reviews, program and financial audits of group homes, financial audits of foster family agencies, and reviews of child fatalities).
- Providing for complaint investigation and grievance processes.
- Making available and using administrative and foster care performance data.

The Statewide Assessment further notes that the primary QA activities are available in every jurisdiction, and the majority are available statewide. However, as the Statewide Assessment notes, the State's principal QA activity is conducting individual county Division 31 compliance reviews, which are limited to assessing county compliance with the following six activities: timely initial contact; monthly contact; health and education information given to provider; timely medical exam; timely dental exam; and Independent Living Program Plan.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that major revisions to the State's QA system are planned. As part of this plan, the State will implement a QA system that is similar to the Federal CFSR and focuses on improving desired outcomes for children. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the challenge to the State in implementing this system will be to define measurable performance indicators that can be derived from the current statewide information system.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic agreed that the State's current Division 31 compliance review system is the State's primary QA mechanism and that it does not address many areas of child welfare agency practice. They noted that the State is developing a new QA system (to be implemented in January 2004) that will be similar to the Federal CFSR process and include random case reviews that are outcome-focused.

Stakeholders also indicated that many counties have developed their own QA procedures. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that the county operates both a process-oriented and an outcome-oriented QA review. The county has implemented the Federal CFSR review instrument and conducted four QA reviews (ranging from 60 to 100 cases) using the CFSR instrument. Stakeholders reported that the Los Angeles County QA reviews result in comprehensive reports to management, although they expressed the opinion that managers do not always use the information in their decision-making processes.

IV. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2 X	3	4

STATUS OF TRAINING

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of training. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 32 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State makes available an array of training opportunities and some counties have implemented formal new-worker training, there is no statewide requirement for initial training for all staff that supports the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) requires CDSS to provide practice-relevant training for social workers, agencies under contract with county welfare departments, mandated child abuse reporters, and all members of the child welfare delivery system. This training is to include all of the following: (1) Crisis intervention; (2) Investigative techniques; (3) Rules of evidence; (4) Indicators of abuse and neglect; (5) Assessment criteria, including the application of guidelines for assessment of relatives for placement; (6) Intervention strategies; (7) Legal requirements of child protection, including requirements of child abuse reporting laws; (8) Case management; (9) Use of community resources; (10) Information regarding the dynamics and effects of domestic violence upon families and children; and (11) Post-traumatic stress disorder and the causes, symptoms, and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in children.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that a standardized core curriculum for staff training has been developed, although it has not yet been implemented. The curriculum is the result of a multi-year, statewide collaborative effort that included the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), the five Regional Training Academies, and the CDSS. The standardized core curriculum is designed to ensure that each new child welfare worker in California is provided with a comprehensive, competency-based training before he or she assumes an independent caseload. Assembly Bill 2779, (Aroner), Chapter 329, Statutes of 1998, appropriated general fund dollars to develop the standardized training curriculum for child welfare workers.

As reported in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS provides direct training to county child welfare staff on changes in State regulations and statutes, implementation of new programs, and transfer of best practices. In addition, CDSS funds five regional training academies to provide training and continuing professional education to county child welfare staff. These academies are university/county/State partnerships charged with meeting the training needs of all counties in their region. CDSS requires that the State's Child Welfare Services Training Academies' curricula include training for county social workers and probation officers regarding their responsibility to deliver services to Native American families and children in accordance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Regional Training Academies have provided over 34,419 worker days of initial and ongoing training in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2000/2001 (a 24% increase over SFY 1998/1999).

Stakeholders commenting on this topic expressed concern about the lack of uniform statewide requirements for staff training or staff development. Stakeholders reported that because training is a county-specific activity, there is considerable variation across the State. In one county included in the on-site review, new-worker training from the Regional Training Academy involves 21 days over a 6-month period. During this time, the new worker also carries a caseload. In another county included in the on-site review, training for new workers encompasses a 3-month period and training is provided both in-house and through the Regional Training Academy. In the third county, new workers complete an 11-week program, including classroom and field work, as well as computer training.

Stakeholders identified other concerns regarding new-worker training. One concern was that because of their high caseloads, case managers and supervisors do not have the opportunity to mentor new staff and provide sufficient hands-on training. Another concern was that in some counties, there is a lack of necessary training of probation staff regarding Division 31 regulations. Finally, stakeholders in one county expressed the opinion that the training provided by its Regional Training Academy is too theoretical and does not focus sufficiently on the actual work.

Stakeholders in one county reported that the child welfare agency is engaged in cross-training activities with probation, law enforcement, mental health, public health, and court personnel. These stakeholders expressed the opinion that cross-training is extremely helpful and conducive to strengthening partnerships. Stakeholders in the other two counties reported that there is no cross-

training between probation and child welfare, and suggested that this training would be useful for workers in both agencies. Some stakeholders also indicated a need for ICWA training. It was noted that the State is planning to provide eight ICWA training sessions and include ICWA as part of the core standardized curriculum. The State has also hired two staff to provide ICWA training and technical assistance.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although a variety of continuing education and training opportunities are made available to staff, there are no statewide requirements for on-going training of staff that support the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan.

According to the Statewide Assessment, ongoing training is the province of the Regional Training Academies, which offer a wide variety of training opportunities. Stakeholders commenting on this topic at the State and local levels reported that there is a wide variety of training opportunities available for staff. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that the county tracks the training history of individual staff and provides all workers with \$300 per year to attend trainings/conferences of their choosing. However, stakeholders in all three counties included in the on-site review reported that workers often cannot take advantage of training opportunities because of their large caseloads.

Stakeholders also expressed concern that participation in ongoing training is not required of child welfare agency staff. In addition, stakeholders voiced concern about the lack of necessary training for probation staff regarding specific child welfare requirements.

Stakeholders identified a need for ongoing training in areas such as concurrent planning, engaging families in the case planning process and developing useful case plans, philosophy behind reunification and permanency, managing hotline calls, forensic interviewing, and paternity issues. They also suggested that training on these topics needs to be provided on a consistent basis. Stakeholders also noted that there are no statewide requirements with respect to supervisory training, although the coordinating agency for training in the State, CalSWEC, has identified supervisory training as a priority for next year. In addition, although some stakeholders reported that ICWA training is available, others noted that more staff and court personnel need ICWA training.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

____ Strength __X__ Area Needing Improvement

Item 34 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State makes training for foster and adoptive caregivers and group-care staff available, there is no uniform statewide training required for all caregivers. In addition, because training requirements for caregivers vary across the State, when foster parents trained in one county move to another county, the training they have received does not always meet the requirements of the new county.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS selected and adapted the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE (Parent Resource for Information Development Education curriculum) as a recommended, but not required, curriculum for county use. (Los Angeles County uses the Pre-service Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting [MAPP]). The PRIDE curriculum focuses on four core competencies: (1) Understand the factors that contribute to neglect, emotional maltreatment, physical abuse and sexual abuse; (2) Know the conditions and experiences that may cause developmental delays and affect attachment; (3) Understand the concept of permanency for children and why children in family foster care are at risk for not being connected to lifetime relationships; and (4) Know the roles, rights, and responsibilities of foster parents and adoptive parents.

A minimum of 12 hours of pre-service training is required for placement of a child in a licensed foster home. A minimum of 8 hours in-service training is required each year that a foster child resides in the licensed home. The number of training hours required for specialized care is determined at the county level and is included in the county's training plans. Group home line staff must receive 40 hours of training in their first year and 20 hours annually thereafter. Group home administrators must complete a 40-hour certification program in addition to other licensing requirements. According to the Statewide Assessment, pre-service and in-service training for foster parents is provided through a curriculum tailored to meet the needs of each community. Many counties use parts of the recommended PRIDE/Adopt Pride curriculum or adjust it to meet local needs and procedures, while others use a completely different curriculum. Some counties provide training directly to foster and adoptive parents and other counties contract with other organizations (agency or educational institutions) for this purpose.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic noted that there is a great deal of variation among counties regarding the implementation and extent of foster parent and adoptive parent training. At the county level, most stakeholders expressed positive opinions about their local foster parent training, and indicated that it is available in several languages, particularly in Los Angeles County. However,

stakeholders expressed concern that because training is county-specific, foster parents who have been trained in one county and move to another county may have to participate in that county's training.

Stakeholders reported that most counties do not exceed the State mandate of 12 hours of pre-service training for licensed foster parents and 8 hours of ongoing training. Stakeholders were in general agreement that this was not sufficient training for licensed foster parents. In addition, stakeholders expressed concern that approved relative caregivers usually are not required to participate in training. Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that relative caregivers must participate in the county training only if they are licensed foster parents. If they are approved but not licensed, they are given an orientation package that they are expected to review on their own and they are encouraged to attend training for kin caregivers provided by the local community college. These Los Angeles County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the agency's training effort for approved relative caregivers was not sufficient to assist relatives in being effective caregivers for the children placed in their homes.

V. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

STATUS OF SERVICE ARRAY

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 35 is rated as a Strength because the State has a broad array of services available that assess the strengths and needs of families to create a safe home environment so that children can remain at home and/or achieve permanency if placed in foster care.

According to the Statewide Assessment, California has an extensive array of services designed to strengthen family functioning and enhance the ability of local communities to support at-risk families. Stakeholders interviewed as part of the State's self-assessment process identified intensive in-home services, parent education and skill development, and family resource centers as key services necessary to prevent out-of-home placement. The Statewide Assessment reports that more than 400 different programs related to prevention of child maltreatment exist in 58 counties. In addition, home-based services (e.g., parent education and support, home visiting, childcare, family group conferencing, substance abuse treatment and wraparound services) are provided to families to help prevent the need for out-of-home placement.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Los Angeles County allocates 70 percent of its funding to support prevention case management through in-home outreach. Services focus on parent education, housing assistance, child-care, and legal aid. In addition, intervention services include anger management, domestic violence groups, after school programs, tutoring, and substance abuse treatment. San Mateo is one of 17 counties that operates the Answers Benefiting Children (ABC) Program, which includes a home visiting component as a core service in the array of services provided at local family resource centers. A 2-year evaluation period examines program components related to home visiting, the level of resident males and father involvement in homes receiving services, changes in service delivery methodology, and program performance.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that State statutes and regulations require juvenile courts to order that reunification services be provided to children removed from the custody of their parents or guardians, and to their parents or guardians, except under narrowly specified circumstances. Specific time limits, which are shorter for children under 3 years of age, are placed on the duration of those services. Counties establish family reunification practices that address local needs and can be provided with available resources. The following is a summary of survey responses regarding the array of reunification services, based on a survey of 45 county child welfare services agencies and 37 juvenile probation departments conducted as part of the State's self-assessment:

- Most counties arrange or provide legal representation for children and parents, although these data suggest that greater focus is placed on the parents of dependents than on the parents of wards during family reunification.
- Nearly all respondents arrange or provide transportation for children to access planned services.
- Most report that medical services, consistent with California Health and Disability Prevention Program guidelines, are available to children countywide, with a small number reporting a waiting list. Medical and dental care is available for all children, but nearly one in ten respondents reported a local waiting list for dental care. These data are consistent with questionnaire responses from public health nurses, who reported a lack of dental care providers in rural parts of the State.

- Medication management services, including those provided by public health nurses, are provided or arranged by most responding counties. Thirty-five percent provide or arrange for physical examinations.
- Most respondents arrange for visitation between children and their parents, siblings and grandparents. (Family visitation arrangements occur at equal rates for dependents and wards.)
- Most responding county agencies provide crisis intervention and refer children and families to community resources, as appropriate.
- Reflecting its relative importance, nearly every respondent reported countywide substance abuse testing for minors and parents, with no waiting lists.
- Drug treatment services are widely available, but waiting lists were reported in some areas.
- Most counties have countywide access to behavior management services or impulse control intervention, with no reported waiting lists.
- Nearly all respondents have countywide counseling for children and for parents, and few reported waiting lists.
- Parenting training is available for the parents of most children receiving family reunification services. Parent training classes for minor parents are available in most counties, particularly the larger counties. However, nearly one in ten respondents reported a waiting list for those classes.
- Mentoring programs for parents and guardians are generally unavailable.

Finally, the Statewide Assessment describes the array of services to promote alternative permanency options when reunification is not possible. These include the California Adoptions Initiative and implementation of the Kinship Care program in 1996, which made significant changes to allow more children to exit the foster care system to safe permanent homes. The Statewide Assessment also notes that the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group, established through legislation in 2000, is making recommendations for redesigning the child welfare system that will emphasize early intervention, prevention, and family support.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic were in general agreement that there is a large array of services available to children and families. They were particularly positive about the Kin-GAP program and the Kinship Support Service Program (KSSP). Stakeholders also noted that pilot programs implementing Family Group Decision Making and Wraparound Services are very effective where they exist. State stakeholders also noted that CDSS has made efforts to strengthen the services array through public-private partnerships.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although the State has many services available, significant service gaps exist. In addition, although there are pilot programs operating in the State that are implementing promising practices, there is no unified approach to implementing promising practices statewide. Finally, there is a lack of necessary core services available in all counties, and in some counties there often are long waiting lists for these services.

According to the Statewide Assessment, not all services are accessible to families in all geographic regions of the State. Some families have to travel long distances to access services, particularly families living in rural areas. In some areas, lack of transportation is a significant barrier to the ability of families to access providers offering medical, dental, and rehabilitation services. In other communities, limited access to low income/affordable housing creates barriers to successful prevention or reunification efforts. Finally, in some counties, the limited availability of appropriate foster family homes may require that children be placed in a foster family home that is not in close proximity to the birth parent's residence. This makes it more difficult for parents and children to visit and consequently impacts reunification. The Statewide Assessment also notes, however, that public health nurses are located in all county child welfare agencies; that the Kinship Support Services Program is available in counties that have a high proportion of children placed with kin; and that the Adoption Assistance Program, which assists children with special needs and their adoptive families, is available throughout the State.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic noted that there were significant gaps in services both within and across counties. One concern identified was that the State has several excellent pilot projects that are implementing effective practices (such as Wraparound Services and Family Group Decision Making), but there is no effort being made to implement these effective practices on a statewide basis. Another concern pertained to the need to strengthen independent living services to adolescents in foster care. Although all counties have an Independent Living Program (ILP) coordinator, implementation of ILP services varies greatly across counties. Stakeholders suggested that for the most part, the current level of caseworker contacts with youth, discussions with youth regarding their needs and goals, and involvement of youth in the development of their case plans is not sufficient. Stakeholders also noted that services are needed that target youths' individualized needs and that provide transitional living services for children emancipating from foster care.

Stakeholders also identified Native American children as a population that does not receive the necessary services because of a general lack of culturally appropriate services across the State. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, a survey of Tribal representatives revealed that culturally appropriate services specifically suited to Native American communities are needed.

Finally, stakeholders identified the following additional services gaps:

- Supervised visiting resources for children
- Foster family homes, especially for teenagers
- Substance abuse treatment facilities where parents can bring their young children
- Post-adoption services
- Respite care
- Residential facilities for children with “high end” treatment needs
- Affordable housing

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 37 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although counties have the flexibility to develop and deliver services to meet unique community needs, stakeholders conveyed concern about a lack of individualized services for youth and Native American children. In addition, many of the cases reviewed had case plans that were generic and lacked an individualized approach to serving children and families.

According to the Statewide Assessment, each county has the flexibility and responsibility to deliver services in a way that most effectively meets local community needs.

Stakeholders reported that in some counties there are flexible funds that promote individualization of services; in some counties, wraparound services are available; and in some counties, the collaborative efforts of the various agencies have resulted in an ability to individualize service provision. In addition, Los Angeles County stakeholders commented that services are culturally responsive and able to meet the various language needs of their families.

However, some stakeholders expressed concern about the over-representation of African American children in the State’s foster care system and questioned whether this may be the result of a lack of individualized services to prevent the entry into foster care of

children in this population. Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that the gaps in necessary services (noted in item 36) make it difficult for the agency to individualize services, especially for adolescents and Native American children and families.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

STATUS OF AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

California is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 38 is rated as a Strength because information provided in the Statewide Assessment and obtained through the onsite CFSR stakeholder interviews indicates that State and county child welfare agencies are highly responsive to input from the community in developing the goals and objectives of the CFSP and have developed councils, task forces, and other organizations to ensure that there are sufficient avenues for community input.

According to the Statewide Assessment, a key component of the agency's responsiveness to the community is the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group. The mandate of the CWS Stakeholders Group is to develop recommendations to improve the State's child welfare system. Members of the CWS Stakeholders Group, who are appointed by the Director of CDSS, represent birth parents; kin caregivers; foster parents; advocates; Indian tribes; public and private service providers; Federal, State, and county child

welfare administrators; consumers of child welfare services; representatives from the State's departments of Health Services, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug, Development Services, Education and Finance; the courts and the legal community; the California State legislature; and research institutions and private foundations involved in child welfare. The CWS Stakeholders Group has issued preliminary recommendations on "re-designing" the system.

The Statewide Assessment also notes that CDSS has supported the development of the California Youth Connection (CYC), an advocacy organization of current and former foster care youth. The CYC was instrumental in securing legislation that addresses extended medical coverage for children exiting foster care and the need for increased contact between siblings who are separated in foster care. Stakeholders report strong communication between the CYC and CDSS. A representative from the CYC is also a member of the CWS Stakeholders Group.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS has developed a range of additional venues for communicating with partner agencies, including the following:

- Operational Implementation Task Force (functions through monthly meetings of representatives from the CWDA Children's Committee and the CDSS to share concerns, policy issues and planning efforts).
- Adoption Policy Advisory Council (established in statute for the duration of the California Adoptions Initiative, ending June 2001, and comprised of stakeholders from across the adoption arena).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Adoptions Subcommittee (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and California Association of Adoption Agencies (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and public adoption agencies (meets quarterly in five regions).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Regional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Foster Care (AFDC-FC) subcommittee on compliance to Title IV-E eligibility (meets quarterly).
- The CDSS and the CWDA Licensing Subcommittee on foster parenting issues (meets quarterly).
- Kinship Care Steering Committee (involves representatives from the CDSS, CWDA, kinship support and advocacy groups, California Children's Lobby and kinship service providers).
- The Prevention Advisory Council (PAC) (provides guidance to the CDSS as it develops policy, practices and procedures designed to protect children and strengthen both families and communities).

Information from the Statewide Assessment and from the onsite phase of the CFSR indicate that counties have extensive collaboration at the local level with providers and community-based service agencies. To achieve this collaboration, counties have formed local advisory boards, coordinating policy councils, and interagency collaboratives. They have conducted community forums and surveys to obtain valuable input on how to ensure that children and families are better served. At both the State and county levels, multiple

opportunities exist for external community stakeholders to be engaged in defining the needs of children and families at-risk. Such collaboration is key to the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan.

Finally, the Statewide Assessment notes that the State's laws and regulations require compliance with ICWA. In recent years, CDSS has worked proactively to better address tribal concerns by: (1) including ICWA in social worker training curricula; (2) establishing the CDSS Tribal Government Advisory Council; (3) establishing State-level staff positions focused on ICWA, including a Tribal Government Liaison; and (4) providing financial support to an annual ICWA conference. Also, stakeholders in Los Angeles County noted that there are American Indian Units established within the county to assist Native American children and families in the child welfare system.

Stakeholders commenting on this area were in general agreement that both the State and local child welfare agencies engage in extensive collaboration with various partners and are responsive to the community. Stakeholders in one county (Stanislaus) reported a long history of extensive collaboration resulting in a range of inter-agency and interdisciplinary teams. In another county, there are Family and Community Advisory Committees that provide parents' input into long-term planning efforts. Finally, Los Angeles County has developed the Los Angeles Children's Commission, which meets twice a month and focuses on children being served by the child welfare agency. The Commission collaborates with the courts and mental health agencies, as well as other relevant agencies. However, several Los Angeles County stakeholders expressed the opinion that the relationship between the child welfare agency and the courts is not as collaborative as it needs to be to ensure positive outcomes for children and families.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because county child welfare agencies and CDSS have established many collaboratives and those partners have begun to participate in the development of the State's Annual Progress and Services Report.

According to the Statewide Assessment, in June 2001, in an effort to more overtly address the planning process with the child welfare community, the Child and Family Services Plan Update was distributed to both the Stakeholders Group and the Child and Family Services Review Steering Committee. Given the roles of these two groups in reviewing the overall child welfare system, they will now have an opportunity to provide additional input during development of the 2002 annual report.

Item 40. The State’s services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Item 40 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although there are exemplary efforts at the county level with regard to coordinating services and benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population, there is a lack of evidence of State-level coordination of services and benefits, including coordination with Tribes and Tribal organizations.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, CDSS is involved in a broad array of efforts to coordinate services among public and private organizations. Examples include the Supportive and Therapeutic Options Program (STOP), State Child Death Review Council, Wraparound Project, Answers Benefiting Children (ABC), and Child Welfare and CalWORKs. The CDSS and local county child welfare agencies work extensively with other public and private service providers to coordinate services to children and families at-risk.

Although stakeholders commenting on this area noted that there are many instances in which local agencies coordinate services to enhance service delivery efforts for children and families, stakeholders at the State level reported that the “silo” approach to funding agencies has been, and continues to be, a barrier to coordinating services at the State level. In particular, State stakeholders expressed a need for a stronger relationship between the courts and local child welfare agencies to ensure greater coordination of services.

In addition to the general issue of the barriers to coordination at the State level, stakeholders noted that greater efforts are needed to coordinate Federally-assisted programs or services for Native American children and families and to ensure county child welfare agency staff adhere to ICWA requirements. However, these stakeholders also noted that CDSS has made significant progress recently in working with Tribes and Tribal organizations to improve service coordination.

VII. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2X	3	4

Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

California is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings with regard to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has established standards for licensing and approving homes that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

According to the Statewide Assessment, the following are the key licensing and approval requirements for all foster homes, including those for kin caregivers:

- Criminal records check: All appropriate persons in the home obtain a criminal record clearance.
- Caregiver qualifications: The caregiver possess qualities that include having the ability to provide appropriate care and supervision, possessing knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, maintaining financial records, etc.
- Physical environment: The home is clean, safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- Personal rights: The caregiver ensures that each child is accorded personal rights.

These standards apply to foster family homes, kin caregivers, adoptive homes, foster family agency (FFA) certified family homes, and child care institutions. CDSS performs the licensing function for foster family homes in 16 counties and for FFAs, childcare institutions, and public and private adoption agencies in all 58 counties. In 42 counties, foster family home licensing is contracted out to the county child welfare agency.

The Statewide Assessment notes that stakeholders interviewed as part of the State's self-assessment process commented that licensing standards are too regimented and scare people away. Also, they focus on younger children and do not allow flexibility to accommodate the needs of older youth. Stakeholders interviewed as part of the Statewide Assessment also said that the licensing process needs to focus more on the quality of the home than on the specific physical requirements of the facility. Concern was expressed that training of foster parents is uneven among counties and affects the quality of care in foster homes.

Some stakeholders interviewed as part of the on-site CFSR process expressed concern that foster homes are not sufficiently monitored to ensure that they are meeting the children's basic needs, such as providing nutritious meals, sufficient clothing, and adequate shelter.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 42 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement. Although CDSS has one common set of licensing/approval standards, there is evidence that, across counties, staff interpretation of the standards is not consistent. As a result, the same standards are not being applied to all foster family homes. In addition, all relative foster family homes have not been assessed and approved against the new standards.

According to the Statewide Assessment, licensing, approval, or certification requirements are consistent for each placement type, regardless of the jurisdiction. In addition, licensing and approval standards are the same across all placement types. AB 1695 (Assembly Human Services Committee), Chapter 653, Statutes of 2001, was enacted to conform State law with recent amendments to Federal statutes and regulations relating to the licensure or approval of foster family homes; this State law requires that relative and non-relative extended family member foster family homes be approved against the standards used for licensing foster family homes.

Stakeholders commenting on this area reported that all new foster families entering the system are assessed and approved according to the licensing/approval standards. However, in Los Angeles County, there are approximately 6,000 relative foster family homes that have not been assessed and approved using the new licensing/approval standards. In addition, although one stakeholder noted that

foster parents can be licensed prior to training, because training is not part of the licensing standards, many other stakeholders indicated that training, including completing CPR and first aid, and “administrative requirements,” such as passing a health exam, a TB test, and a fire inspection are required for licensing, but not for approving, foster family homes.

Los Angeles County stakeholders reported that the State’s Community Care Licensing (CCL) division conducts the licensing procedures and the county does a psychosocial assessment of prospective licensees. Therefore, it is possible that a home may be licensed but the county will not use it if it does not meet the standards established for the psychosocial assessment. This process of having two separate processes by two distinct agencies is duplicative and is confusing to both foster families and workers. Additionally, although licensing is expected to annually evaluate homes to ensure continued compliance with standards, the county does not annually do a psychosocial re-assessment of caregivers.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because stakeholders reported that criminal background checks for foster and adoptive placements are completed prior to placing a child with the family.

According to the Statewide Assessment, State law requires a review of criminal records for all prospective foster parents, kinship care providers, adoptive parents, and childcare institution staff. A criminal record check is not limited to the applicants. For instance, other adults and, in some cases, children residing in the home of the applicant must also be checked. All care providers and facility staff are required to submit two sets of fingerprint cards, a request for check of the California CACI and a signed declaration regarding any prior criminal convictions as a condition of employment, residence or presence in the facility. The criminal background check for adoptive applicants includes a full criminal record report, which contains information on arrests (as well as convictions).

California law also requires a check of the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) maintained by the California Department of Justice and in many counties reviews of Department of Motor Vehicle records are conducted.

Stakeholders commenting on this topic generally agreed that criminal background checks and CACI clearances are being conducted on a routine basis. Los Angeles County noted that criminal reports for relative and non-relative extended family member caregivers are sent to the caseworkers and the decision-making responsibility with regard to interpreting the reports and applying exemptions lies

with each caseworker. However, additional levels of review (i.e., the supervisor and regional and area administrators) are in place to ensure that exemptions are being appropriately applied. Stakeholders also conveyed concern that criminal background information for licensed caregivers is not shared routinely with the county's staff responsible for completing the psychosocial assessments.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

☐ Strength ☒ Area Needing Improvement

Item 44 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the State does not have a statewide process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in care.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, recruitment activities occur at the individual county level and at a regional level, with multiple counties working cooperatively. State/county and public/private partnerships also play a significant role in recruitment efforts. The Statewide Assessment also notes that California has established a process for recruiting potential foster and adoptive parents that reflects the diversity of the State's foster children, although recruiting sufficient numbers of families to meet the needs of children in care continues to be a challenge. The State has developed a five-year strategic plan for recruitment of foster and adoptive parents that is currently under review.

Stakeholders commenting on this area at the State level noted that there are a variety of recruitment efforts including television spots, special programs focusing on recruiting minority foster and adoptive parents, and a toll-free telephone number for interested families. In addition, State stakeholders reported that the Family-to-Family initiative results in recruiting both foster and adoptive parents and in keeping children in their communities. While almost one third of the children in foster care are African American and while this proportion increases when separated by age, the State does not have a specific statewide foster and adoptive parent recruitment plan to address the need for homes for this population of children. Stakeholders also noted that there is a need to recruit more Native American homes. In Los Angeles County, however, there is a Native American unit within the agency that helps in the recruitment of Native American foster homes. A few stakeholders also commented on the number of children for whom parental rights have been terminated but who are without an identified adoptive family. Stakeholders also reported that the difficulty in obtaining child care and respite care is a barrier to retaining foster parents that is not being addressed.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Item 45 is rated as a Strength because there are processes in place for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements.

According to the Statewide Assessment, under California law (Family Code Section 8708(c)), a child's adoptive placement cannot be delayed or denied based on the prospective adoptive parent living outside the jurisdiction of the department or the licensed adoption agency. California formed the Cross Jurisdictional Task Force to develop strategies to maintain compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act related to cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements. The Task Force developed checklists to assist adoption agencies in completing inter-jurisdictional placements. In SFY 2000/2001, cross-jurisdictional placements increased 48.5% over the previous fiscal year.

The Statewide Assessment notes that efforts at increasing the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for adoptive placements include recruitment strategies such as the California Kids Connection Program website. Statewide, five programs meet monthly to share specific information regarding family and children. A support coordinator is responsible for assisting in matching waiting children with available families identified by the exchange. The website program offers both a secure and a public website. The public website is accessible to any Internet user. Visitors indicate their interest in specific children by sending an email to the placing agency identified for each child. Many public adoption agencies also maintain their own websites featuring children available within their county.

Finally, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, a child's Adoption Assistance Program benefit is based on the foster care payment of either the receiving county or State, if the child is placed outside of the financially responsible California county. This regulation removes a potential barrier for cross-jurisdictional placements.

Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that recruitment efforts often cross county lines and both internal and national adoption exchanges are used to find potential adoptive families.

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place an “X” beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Outcomes

I. Safety

N **Outcome S1**

 Item 1

 X Item 2

N **Outcome S2**

 Item 3

 Item 4

II. Permanency

N **Outcome P1**

 X Item 5

 X Item 6

 X Item 7

 X Item 8

 X Item 9

 X Item 10

N **Outcome P2**

 Item 11

 Item 12

 Item 13

 X Item 14

 Item 15

 Item 16

III. Child and Family Well-Being

N **Outcome WB1**

 X Item 17

 X Item 18

 Item 19

 X Item 20

N **Outcome WB2**

 X Item 21

N **Outcome WB3**

 Item 22

 X Item 23

Systemic Factors

IV. Y Statewide Information System

 Item 24

V. N Case Review System

 X Item 25

 Item 26

 Item 27

 X Item 28

 Item 29

VI. N Quality Assurance System

 Item 30

 X Item 31

VII. N Training

 X Item 32

 X Item 33

 X Item 34

VIII. N Service Array

 Item 35

 X Item 36

 X Item 37

IX. Y Agency Responsiveness to the Community

 Item 38

 Item 39

 Item 40

X. N Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

 Item 41

 X Item 42

 Item 43

 X Item 44

 Item 45